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The University of Southern Mississippi
MAKING MEANING OF THE REEL:
THE MEDIA'S PORTRAYAL OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

Jena Lee Hawk

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2014

ABSTRACT

MAKING MEANING OF THE REEL:

THE MEDIA'S PORTRAYAL OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by Jena Lee Hawk

August 2014

Due to its seemingly unclear and ambiguous mission, the community college has somewhat of a stigma attached to it as a four-year institution defines the American college experience (LaPaglia, 1994). Although only a few studies concerning media portrayals of community college students have been published within the last twenty years, the existing studies (Bourke, Major, & Harris, 2009; LaPaglia, 1994; Tucciarone, 2007) have failed to address if the media's portrayal of community colleges influences students' decisions or actions with regard to enrolling in a two-year institution. Using the theoretical framework of critical media literacy, the researcher will examine if media portrayals determine if there is a message that creators and producers of media are attempting to convey with regard to community colleges and their students. In addition, this study will also examine if media portrayals influence students' intent to enroll in a community college.

This qualitative study examined Mississippi community college students' attitudes and beliefs toward media portrayals that feature community colleges and their students to see what students learn from these portrayals and how their attitudes and beliefs influenced their decision to attend a specific type of institution. Currently

enrolled college students who shared an interest in media portrayals featuring two-year institutions and their students participated in the interviews. Pearl River Community College and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College served as sites of data collection. After the researcher conducted interviews, they were coded and analyzed for thematic content.

As part of the study's data analysis phase, the researcher identified five common themes that emerged during the interviews. Among the themes that emerged are those concerning the inaccuracy of media portrayals that feature community colleges and their students and the various reasons as to why students enroll in two-year institutions. The findings of the study suggested media portrayals did not influence community college students' decision to enroll in a specific type of institution.

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by

Jena Lee Hawk

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Enrolling nearly half of all undergraduate students in higher education in the United States, community colleges provide opportunities to students who otherwise may be unable to attend (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2013; Weisbrod, Ballou, & Asch, 2008). Community colleges provide an affordable opportunity for students to earn academic or transferable coursework, but unlike four-year institutions they also allow individuals to earn career skills to learn a trade or to enter the workforce (Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Thelin, 2004). Although community colleges were founded as liberal arts institutions, many community college presidents and leaders failed to convey clearly the mission of the community college for its various publics or constituents (Thelin, 2004; Vaughan, 1986). As a result, the idea of a community college offering a liberal arts education gradually evolved into a comprehensive institution offering both academic and vocational programs.

Considering the evolution and ambiguity of the community college mission, governments as well as politicians view community colleges as institutions that can offer those educational programs (vocational, technical, career, community education, etc.) that political figures perceive as necessary to enhance the well-being of their state. Cohen and Brawer (2008) maintained that “education is an essential expenditure for economic growth, a common good . . .” (p. 269). If the goal of the community college is to benefit society, it must produce a skilled workforce that will be prepared for available employment opportunities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Oftentimes, the focus is not on

academic instruction at community colleges as they are reduced in importance compared to four-year institutions (Dean Dad, 2012). This is especially true considering that community colleges are open-access comprehensive institutions that provide students with a choice of academic and/or vocational programs (Vaughan, 2006). Brint and Karabel (1989) noted that as a result of increasing political pressure, two-year institutions seem to focus more on workforce development programs than on academic programs, and they contended that this trend continues to be the focus of today's two-year institutions. Describing how the community affects two-year institutions, Dean Dad (2012) pointed out, "The second word in 'community college' is 'college,' which is easy to forget when the political discourse reduces community colleges to training centers" (para. 5).

At times, community college leaders are unable to implement their own initiatives and/or focus on academic programs. Instead, they are forced to follow state or local funding and implement vocational or workforce training programs (Eddy, 2010). Eddy (2010) argued that a common debate concerning community colleges is that their increased partnerships with industries in the local community influence these institutions to focus more on their vocational program offerings. This is not to say that every community college has been reduced to workforce development. However, it does note the political attention that vocational and career training receives at community colleges when only 21% of full-time enrollment in Mississippi community colleges accounts for enrollment in these programs. In contrast, 70.5% of full-time community college students are enrolled in academic programs (Mississippi Community College Board, 2013).

Seeing the external perception of community colleges as vocational training centers is just a sole example that illustrates how community colleges are portrayed in the media. Using a critical media framework, which asks viewers to analyze and question the content of media messages, the researcher examined television shows and motion picture portrayals of community colleges to see what information students learn from portrayals of these institutions. Also, the researcher examined if these portrayals had any influence on students as they decided to attend a community college in the state of Mississippi. In order to examine these issues, the researcher recruited 12 research participants via purposeful sampling, specifically using snowball sampling, from Pearl River Community College (PRCC) and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC). Data collection consisted of 12 semi-structured interviews that each lasted 50-60 minutes. As part of the interviews, research participants were asked to listen to one audio clip and view three media clips. After doing so, they were asked questions regarding their attitudes toward the portrayal of community colleges in these media clips.

As this study was limited in scope to the southern region of Mississippi, it was important to examine current statewide initiatives that may influence individuals' attitudes and beliefs toward community colleges. Announcing his plan for workforce development in his state, Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant (2012), as he expressed in his inaugural state-of-the-state-address, urged his state to create a program that will offer high-school students who are at-risk of dropping out of school the opportunity to dual-enroll in workforce development programs at Mississippi's community colleges. He believed that in allowing students to enroll in vocational training courses at two-year institutions, the students will learn a skill that will eventually lead to employment. This

program, as announced by Governor Bryant in 2012, was called Mississippi Works. In his 2014 state-of-the-state address, Bryant (2014) expanded this program in an attempt to provide Mississippians with suitable employment and/or job-training. According to the Mississippi Works website (2014), the purpose of the statewide initiative was “ensuring that every Mississippian has a job [which] takes the commitment of innovators in all parts of Mississippi’s workforce economy: employers, state agencies, education and training providers, and economic developers” (para. 3). As a result, community colleges are prevented from implementing their own plans due to external political pressure, or they are forced to follow funding that creates opportunities for the unemployed instead of focusing equally on the various missions of the community college (Eddy, 2010).

A community college, for the purpose of this study, was defined as a two-year institution of higher education that offers vocational and academic programs and confers associate degrees. The words “community colleges” and “two-year institutions” are used interchangeably throughout this paper as opposed to “junior colleges,” which became somewhat outdated during the community college’s development (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Thelin, 2004). Considering the term “junior college” suggests deference to four-year colleges and universities, it renders a bit of a negative image for the two-year institutions (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Thelin, 2004). Describing how a negative image may adversely affect an institution of higher education, Hinton (1994) explicated, “Since colleges and universities derive their financial support from public appropriations and private donations, a negative public image often leads to financial pressures and restricted budgets” (p. 2). As politicians do not see the merits or results of two-year institutions, the funding levels of community colleges are usually at a

disadvantage when compared to four-year institutions that may possess clearly articulated and defined missions, which are supported by comprehensive academic programs and prescribed curricula.

While governmental demands and financial constraints have forced community colleges to appeal to non-traditional students and focus on vocational/technical offerings, the outcome is that less emphasis is placed on academic offerings at the community college level. However, political initiatives, community demands, and financial affairs are not the only contributors to the ambiguous mission of two-year institutions. Another contributing factor to the expansive mission of the community college is that its early leaders modeled the mission of the institution after their own values. As many leaders of the community college were born shortly before or after the Great Depression, these individuals learned the values of education, dedication, and success as they watched their fathers work in labor-oriented or working-class jobs (Vaughan, 1986).

As a result, these leaders were instrumental in shaping the mission of the community college, but they failed to articulate a formal and transparent mission that guided the institution. The President's Commission of Higher Education of 1947 suggested that community colleges should offer general education courses (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The values of these early community college leaders explain why community college presidents so willingly embraced career and occupational training that would provide individuals with opportunities to improve their own quality of life. Early community college leaders, especially presidents, had fathers who worked blue-collar jobs, so many presidents were motivated to advance themselves through the academic ranks via educational and professional goals. In recalling their own pasts, community

college presidents realized that a demand for workforce development existed and created programs that would prepare individuals for employment in addition to offering programs of study that would prepare students for academic studies and allow them to transfer to a four-year college or university (Vaughan, 1986).

In recognizing that a need for higher education existed in the state of Mississippi, its leaders had the vision to see what other states were doing with regard to offering postsecondary opportunities for students, and as a result of the success of these institutions in other states, leaders in Mississippi created a similar institution. These leaders established community colleges in the existent buildings of the state's agricultural high schools. Much of the state's economy, at the time, was dependent upon agriculture, and these leaders connected community colleges to the state, as doing so was beneficial for the state as well as for these institutions (Eells, 1931; Young & Ewing, 1978). At the high schools, there were already many components of the community college in place, including competent teachers, administrators, and trustees, to see that students received a quality education that would transfer to a four-year institution. Community colleges in Mississippi resulted from Senate Bill 251 that the state legislature approved in 1922, which allowed high schools to offer the first two years of college curriculum. Six years later in 1928, the legislature passed Senate Bill 131. This bill established the Commission of Junior Colleges, the first state-organized governing board of junior colleges in the nation (Young & Ewing, 1978). This date is questioned at times because others believe that Mississippi's state board of community colleges was not established until the Junior College Commission approved a motion February 7, 1929, that established the statewide system.

Although community colleges were organized to increase opportunities for state residents, these institutions are often portrayed negatively in motion pictures and television shows. Some recent portrayals that feature community colleges and their students include *The Big Bang Theory* (Lorre & Prady, 2007-2014), *Larry Crowne* (Goetzman, Hanks, & Hanks, 2011), *Community* (Guarascio & Port, 2013; Harmon, 2009-2012), *Tosh.0* (Tosh, Gibbons, & Tomlinson, 2009-2013), *The Blind Side* (Johnson, Kosove, Netter, & Hancock, 2009), *Deck the Halls* (Milchan, Costigan, Whitesell, & Whitesell, 2006), *The Next Three Days* (Katagas, Mentre, & Haggis, 2010), *Rookie Blue* (Cameron & Wellington, 2012), and *Two and a Half Men* (Lorre, Aronsohn, & Widdoes, 2012). For example, in *The Big Bang Theory* (Lorre, Aronsohn, Goetsch, & Cendrowski, 2010), Penny, a former community college student and current waitress at the Cheesecake Factory, inquires of Sheldon Cooper, a theoretical physicist who earned two doctorates, if she can ask him a question. Replying to Penny, Sheldon said, “Given your community college education, I encourage you to ask as many as possible” (Lorre et al., 2010). The implication is that Penny is inferior to Sheldon with regard to education and intelligence on the basis that her education consisted of her attendance at a community college.

In addition to this episode from *The Big Bang Theory* (Lorre, et al., 2010), the media clip “Adventures in Community College Teaching Episode 1” (2011) portrayed community colleges in a seemingly pejorative manner. Tiffany, a community college student, questioned her instructor as to why he did not return her paper to her when the instructor returned the other students’ papers to them. The community college instructor, “Doctor Professor Johnson,” informed the student that she did not format her paper

correctly. Upon inquiring as to the reasons why she formatted her paper very uniquely, Tiffany said, “Well, yeah, I thought it looked cute” and asked, “What’s wrong with my paper looking cute?” After the instructor explained the criteria that he used to assess the paper and the fact that she is in college and must meet the minimal requirements, Tiffany said, “Yeah, but it’s not Harvard,” and “Yeah, okay, but it’s not like it is real college” (“Adventures,” 2011). These examples suggest and even advertise that the community college is an institution of higher learning that values low achievement, open admission, poor instruction, inferior knowledge, and vocational/technical training (Tucciarone, 2007). These portrayals, as created and generated by the media, defined as all print and electronic forms, do little to enhance public perception of and social relationships with two-year institutions.

As a result of the media’s influential nature and community college’s ever-evolving mission, the media have reinforced substandard images of community colleges in the minds of many Americans with their repeated portrayals of these institutions. For example, in *Rookie Blue* (Cameron & Wellington, 2012), Henry McLeod, played by William Shatner, is arrested for causing a four-car pileup while driving intoxicated. As Officer Dov Epstein charges McLeod, he insists that he must be released from police custody in a timely fashion. McLeod stated, “I have a right to justice in a timely and and [sic] expedient fashion.” Upon hearing these remarks, Office Epstein replied, “Let me guess . . . lawyer?” With a quick and ill-humored response, McLeod berated and demeaned Epstein for taking too much time with regard to his booking, as McLeod stated, “Let me guess . . . community college?” (Cameron & Wellington, 2012). In doing

so, McLeod implies that Officer Epstein is incompetent when he is, in reality, taking meticulous detail while he charges McLeod.

Likewise, a similar pejorative reference is seen in *Community* (Harmon, Russo, & Russo, 2009), which is set at Greendale Community College. In Greendale's case, the diversity of the institution is represented by a study group chronicled by the series, which includes a non-traditional student, a disbarred lawyer, a former standout athlete, a recovering drug addict, a twenty-year-old high-school dropout, a successful entrepreneur, and an aspiring filmmaker. In welcoming the students to campus during the first week of classes, Dean Craig Pelton stated

What is community college? Well, you have heard all kinds of things. You have heard it's loser college, heard remedial teens, twenty-something dropouts, middle age divorcees and old people keeping their minds active as they circle the drain of eternity. That's what you heard. However, I wish you luck! (Harmon et al., 2009).

As he addressed the students returning to campus, Dean Pelton evoked a number of stereotypes that are commonly associated with community college students. He demeaned traditional students as he referred to them as "remedial teens," which illustrated the immaturity and ill-preparedness of traditional students attending a community college (Harmon et al., 2009). He also debased the developmental or compensatory offerings that often are part of a community college's curriculum. In addition to making fun of traditional students, he disgraced non-traditional students as he referred to community college dropouts, middle-age students, and older students. By including these groups in his remarks, he expressed commonplace attitudes toward

community colleges and their students in a convincing manner that viewers accept, often without questioning his message.

From each of these media scenes, audience members can see how the community college has a student population that is described as being subpar to four-year post-secondary students. Many of the media portrayals make fun of community college students as these students are depicted as being unenlightened and unknowing, as compared to their peers. Part of the community college's mission is to expand access (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Thelin, 2004; Vaughan, 2006). As the community college expands access, it increases opportunities for all. Many individuals who take advantage of these opportunities and enroll in community colleges are first-generation, minority, low-socioeconomic, and immigrant students, who are confronted, and even conflicted, by difficult social issues, including poverty and parenthood (AACC, 2014; Shiffman, 2014). With their open-access admission policies, community colleges obtain a very diverse student population, and many of these students are conflicted by difficult circumstances that pertain to personal finances, family situations, and social issues. Regardless of the students they serve and the situations in which these students find themselves, community colleges attempt to provide opportunities to these students and encourage them to contribute productively to society (Shiffman, 2014).

At times, films concern these social issues, while at other times media portrayals may exaggerate community colleges due to their diversity. Illustrating the power of films, Tucciarone (2007) noted that films present an up-close portrayal of a somewhat obscure notion or entity to a mass audience in which the obscurity of these ideas emanate from the audience's lack of knowledge. Thus, as long as a film or other form of media is

convincing, audiences tend to internalize its message, despite its veracity or accuracy, especially if an audience is unfamiliar with the content of the media portrayal. Of the films that portray higher education, the majority focus on the social aspects of a four-year college or university while overlooking the aspects pertaining to academics (Tucciarone, 2007). Tisdell (2007) contended that scholars have largely overlooked the media's influence on adult education, which is related to higher education, as it consists of "activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults" (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 7). Although adult education has largely been overlooked, when there are references in the media to two-year institutions, they are usually dismissed as a "source of laughter" or not a viable alternative for a student (Tucciarone, 2007, p. 40).

To date, only a few studies (Bourke et al., 2009; LaPaglia, 1994; Tucciarone, 2007) have focused specifically on the media's influence on community colleges. LaPaglia (1994) indicated that American fiction, including both print as well as the electronic mediums of television and film, does not contain many references to or plots about community colleges and/or their students, which she finds disturbing when she considers that half of all post-secondary students are enrolled in two-year institutions. She observed that when community college students appear in American fiction, they are portrayed as "mediocre, probably losers, and usually unsympathetic" (p. 6). Both LaPaglia (1994) and Tucciarone (2007) concluded that American fiction, regardless of the medium, reflects the image of the inferior status of community colleges and their students and does not reflect the actuality of two-year institutions.

Although LaPaglia (1994) and Tucciarone (2007) noted the inferior status of the community college, Bourke et al. (2009) maintained that community college students, as portrayed in movies and novels, are depicted positively as students were satisfied with their decision to attend community college. The researchers indicated that the negative portrayals were reflective of a student's lack of motivation and not the institution itself (Bourke et al., 2009). Considering that only a few studies (Bourke et al., 2009; LaPaglia, 1994; Tucciarone, 2007) analyzing fictional portrayals of community colleges have been published to date, there is a need to examine how the media shape the mindset of individuals with regard to higher education, particularly focusing on community colleges and their students.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, the researcher employed the theoretical framework of critical media literacy. Using this framework, the researcher examined media portrayals to determine if audiences accept these media portrayals or if they question the content of the messages conveyed via the media. The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) (2014) stated that media literacy is the ability to analyze symbols and messages conveyed via the media, which refers to all print and electronic forms. The Center for Media Literacy (CML) (2003) maintained that the importance of teaching media literacy is that it can empower individuals to think critically about the messages that the media convey. So, critical media literacy involves examining the conditions that perpetuate social injustice in an attempt to extinguish such injustices or to create alternate media that do not oppress or marginalize others (Semali, 2000). As critical media literacy has emerged as a field of study, it is clear that the media have a

strong influence on its viewing public; therefore, media literacy becomes, as Kellner and Share (2005) explain, a pedagogy as it has the power to teach, shape, and influence one's opinion, self-image, and perspective.

Considering the influence that the media have, educators must teach critical media literacy skills to all students as they live in a multicultural society, thus exposing students to inequalities that exist within their society. Kellner and Share (2005) agreed that media portrayals can make social injustices visible to a mass audience and that other media can be produced to circumvent these portrayals, thereby applauding and embracing society's diversity. With regard to this study, critical media literacy can be used to examine how social injustice becomes apparent in media portrayals and works to marginalize community colleges, with student populations that tend to consist of low-socioeconomic students, minority students, immigrant, and first-generation students (AACC, 2014). Dr. Pam Y. Eddinger (as cited in Shiffman, 2014), president of Bunker Hill Community College in Boston, said that first generation community college students are challenged by a number of social issues, and she contended that these students are a collective representation of the community. She believed these students are representative of community college students as two-year colleges do not select their students. Dr. Bruce H. Leslie (as cited in Shiffman, 2014), chancellor of Alamo Colleges in Texas, added to Eddinger's remarks that the average age of students is 26 years old at his institution. He referred to these students as swirling students because they enroll and drop out as a result of contending with life's difficult issues, such as balancing work, family, and classes. He stated that some of his students take 10 years to graduate with their degrees. But, as the students grow in their academics, they also grow financially and socially (as cited in

Shiffman, 2014). Considering the life issues that confront community college students, community colleges tend to be different than the accepted norm, which is a residential college experience at a four-year institution (LaPaglia, 1994). Because community college students often deviate from the norm, they frequently are unjustly portrayed in the media as their differences may be satirized or belittled. However, the influence of this social injustice can be diminished if audiences are taught to view the media using a critical media literacy perspective.

Semali (2000) stated that critical pedagogy is foundational to studies in critical media literacy. He contended that critical pedagogy, which is a product of critical theorists, examines the current cultural climate as it pertains to individuals' development. In "Lessons from Paulo Freire," Giroux (2010) indicated that Freire "occupies a hallowed position among the founders of 'critical pedagogy'" (para. 1). Giroux (2010) defined critical pedagogy as "the educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action" (para 1). Expounding upon this idea, Giroux (2010) explained that critical pedagogy allows individuals to relate their own personal experiences to the information that is being introduced. In order to relate their own experiences, individuals must engage critically in thought. They must participate actively and self-reflectively as they consider accepted ideologies, assumptions, and beliefs from a new perspective and/or in a new context. Examining and questioning accepted beliefs allows individuals to realize the social injustices that are prevalent among oppressed groups in the media while also recognizing

that a sense of social privilege exists among certain or elite groups in society (Semali, 2000).

As he recognized inequalities among groups and saw oppression in society, Max Horkheimer, a member of Germany's Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, more commonly referred to as the Frankfurt School, is credited with introducing the concept of critical theory (Semali, 2000). Horkheimer (1982) defined critical theory as applying to any theory that worked "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (p. 244). Semali (2000) pointed out that when this definition of critical theory is applied to media literacy, the concept of critical media literacy or examining the media in an attempt to recognize oppression and social injustice is born. In order to teach individuals to view media critically, individuals must receive education in which they are taught to question the content and accuracy of media messages. Kellner and Share (2005) wrote that once viewers are able to examine media representations using a critical approach, they are more likely to see oppression and combat inequalities. In addition to identifying oppression and injustices, individuals are more likely to voice their concerns and create their own representations that are completely devoid of oppression (Kellner & Share, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Due in part to the media along with an ambiguous mission, "the community college still suffers from an identity problem: its nature and role in higher education are not clearly understood by both external and internal groups" (Townsend, 1986, p. 316). The unclear identity and diverse programs have contributed much to the negative image of the community college (Cowles, 1991; Thelin & Townsend, 1988; Townsend, 1986).

Kotler (1982) contended that people are perceptive of the image of an organization; in fact, he wrote that people are more aware of and attentive to the influential element of an organization's image than the organization's day-to-day operations. One reason as to why individuals are more aware of an organization's image is due to the media, which have become an ever-increasing component of today's society and are influential with regard to shaping attitudes and beliefs.

One way in which the media have shaped attitudes and beliefs toward higher education is through media portrayals of four-year institutions. LaPaglia (1994) detailed that media portrayals focusing on four-year institutions have established the notion of what it means to be a college student or professor in America. As four-year colleges and universities are seen as the norm, a two-year college has to combat the idea of what it means to attend college in America, especially when the image of a college student is a full-time student who lives on campus. LaPaglia (1994) stated that because community colleges do not fit the accepted norm of higher learning, these institutions are often belittled or marginalized in fiction. Thus, when students of these institutions appear in the media, they are treated in a similar fashion to the manner in which community colleges are treated. These students are often presented in terms that are socially unjust or otherwise demean or degrade them. They also are presented in a way that suggests that they are absurd or eccentric. Because some groups are included in the media while other groups are excluded, media portrayals "benefit dominant and positively represented groups and disadvantage marginalized and subordinate ones" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 370). The media benefit four-year colleges and universities because they are seen as accepted or legitimate institutions while community colleges and their students are

marginalized and treated unjustly because community colleges tend to have open admission, inadequate instruction, and career training (Tucciarone, 2007). These portrayals become troubling when people accept the portrayals and fail to question their validity or veracity (Kellner & Share, 2005).

With regard to existing literature that focuses on community colleges and their portrayals in the media, LaPaglia (1994), Tucciarone (2007), and Bourke et al. (2009) analyzed the media's portrayal of two-year institutions in fiction and film. LaPaglia (1994) and Tucciarone (2007) examined the portrayal of community colleges in fiction and film, respectively, and found that community colleges were regarded as inferior to four-year institutions. However, Bourke et al. (2009) found that characters in fiction attended community college for a variety of reasons including immediate financial stability, career opportunities, skill development, or transferable coursework. The researchers concluded that the students, for the most part, had positive experiences and expressed satisfaction with their attendance at community college.

Although few studies concerning media portrayals of community college students have been published within the last ten years, none of the studies (Bourke et al., 2009; Tucciarone, 2007) analyzed recent media portrayals that have appeared on screen within the past ten years. In fact, Tucciarone (2007) used a 2001 movie titled *Evolution*, which is the most recent portrayal that has been analyzed in the scholarship. The studies (Bourke et al., 2009; LaPaglia, 1994; Tucciarone, 2007) failed to address if the media's portrayal of community colleges influences students' decisions or actions with regard to enrolling in a two-year institution. There is a need to examine how the media influence students' decisions to enroll in two-year institutions as it is essential to know if students

deduce meaning from media portrayals and relate to fictional portrayals of community college students. To fill this void, the theoretical framework of critical media literacy was used to examine popular culture portrayals to determine if there is a message that creators and producers of media are attempting to convey with regard to higher education and if this message influences students' decisions and actions.

In today's society, individuals are constantly barraged with messages and ideas contained within the media. Tisdell (2007) suggested that critical media literacy can "both resist and reinforce the interest of the dominant culture" (p. 6). With this in mind, the media either work to reinforce common interests held by individuals or work to resist or diminish commonly accepted notions as the media attempt to convey a different message. Without assessing attitudes and beliefs in a media-dominated society, any understanding as to how the media influences a student's action to attend a specific type of institution is purely speculative.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand how the media influence undergraduate students' decisions to enroll in two-year institutions. The following questions provided guidance for this study:

R1: What did the participants learn about community colleges from media portrayals of these institutions?

R2: How did these media portrayals influence the participants' decisions to attend or enroll in a two-year community college?

Data collection consisted of 12 semi-structured interviews that each lasted 50-60 minutes. The researcher conducted interviews on the campuses of two-year institutions

in the southeastern United States. Students were recruited for personal interviews which explored undergraduate students' opinions concerning whether media portrayals influenced their enrollment in or attendance at a specific type of institution. Purposeful sampling, specifically snowball sampling, was used to recruit research participants who were over the age of 18 and possessed an interest in popular culture. Research participants included currently enrolled students who attended a two-year institution for at least one semester.

Justification

There are a number of reasons why this study has merits in the literature of higher education administration, specifically for community college practitioners. Bourke et al. (2009) posited that it is important to understand the manner in which the media portray community colleges because everyone in society has access to and is surrounded by the media. Tucciarone (2007) indicated that movies offer students a glimpse of the institution, so they have a limited viewpoint that allows them to see inside a community college. Without the episodes, scenes, and descriptions that the media provide, community colleges would be somewhat obscure to the public, specifically to potential students, as they would not have any knowledge of institutions of higher education (Tucciarone, 2007). In fact, Lendy (2009) found that individuals who lived near community colleges only possessed a minimal knowledge about them and were not aware as to how the college could benefit them or their children. The media portrayals that these individuals view construct their knowledge of community colleges and their students, regardless of their accuracy or veracity.

Considering the public's lack of knowledge with regard to the community college, the media are very influential and powerful in shaping the attitudes, knowledge, and values of the viewing public (Tucciarone, 2007). Bourke et al. (2009) noted that these same individuals who consume and internalize media may never see a community college bulletin, website, or publication, so the media may solely shape and form their attitudes and beliefs toward community colleges. In other words, the information that individuals see on television and in other forms of media may be the image that they believe accurately represents community colleges (Bourke et al., 2009). Oftentimes, the information portrayed may be skewed or inaccurate.

If potential students and community members are exposed to misinformation pertaining to the community college, they may misunderstand the purpose and mission of a community college. Thus, this illustrates the importance of working to create a society that is educated with regard to media literacy. Kellner and Share (2005) contended that creating a critical media literate society empowers individuals as it encourages them to form their own identities and to transform the social conditions of their society. This is especially true as the media's influence continues to grow and illustrates the importance of critical media literacy. Students must become competent with regard to media literacy, so they will be able to "take on more responsibility for and control over their own learning" (Anderson, 2007, p. 64). Without media education, individuals are unable to identify information that may be valid, false, biased, or distorted. Media education empowers students as viewers, and they learn to question the content and examine the purpose of media messages as opposed to viewing media messages in an accepting fashion. As students become more active participants and responsible media consumers,

they will not be as easily influenced to adopt the values, thoughts, beliefs, and practices that they see portrayed in the media (Yates, 2004).

With regard to recruitment and marketing efforts, community college practitioners must rely on the positive aspects of their institutions, such as their emphasis on quality instruction, small class size and low student/teacher ratio, as well as the convincing aspects that emanate from media portrayals of community colleges. At the same time, community colleges must be aware of and attentive to negative portrayals because in many instances, an individual's first and perhaps only look into a community college may be via the television or some other medium of popular culture. If community colleges are aware of these media portrayals, they can develop marketing strategies and advertising campaigns to counter these portrayals in order to effectively reach their target publics, both traditional and non-traditional students. In doing so, community college practitioners will be able to reach prospective and potential students as well as other groups that could take an interest in the community college (Bourke et al., 2009).

As marketing and recruitment efforts become increasingly important, community colleges are looking more and more to these efforts to increase enrollment and recruit students, but they also have competition from other types of institutions. Bourke et al. (2009) indicated that community colleges must compete with for-profit colleges and universities for a very distinct type of student. The researchers noted that institutions in the for-profit sector seek to increase their enrollments and often seek the same type of students, including traditional, non-traditional students, and non-degree seeking students, as do community colleges (Bourke et al., 2009). In fact, online education, as developed and offered by many for-profit institutions, market their institutions as extension services

to non-traditional students, including adult students as well as students located in rural areas (Willinsky, Fischman, & Metcalfe, 2011).

If community college professionals enhance their understanding of how their institutions are portrayed in the media, they can be better prepared to understand the public's perception of community colleges. Describing how fictional portrayals of higher education influence students, Thelin and Townsend (1988) wrote that "the art of the college novel is influencing the life and expectations of applicants and students" (p. 189). Likewise, students see what institutions are like as they view media or read novels, and they develop expectations based upon these portrayals regardless of how realistic these portrayals are. Community college professionals need to be aware of and concerned with the manner in which the media portray their institutions as this negative image may influence funding-levels, current students, and future students (Tucciarone, 2007). In addition to influencing the attitudes and beliefs of current and future students, Tucciarone (2007) also pointed out that the pejorative image of community colleges in the media may influence donors who are interested in contributing money to community colleges as well as lawmakers who make crucial decisions determining funding and policies that affect two-year institutions. If community college professionals are aware of their institution's image in the media, they can work to alter or counter the image as opposed to playing the role of media victim (Tucciarone, 2007). Instead of this role, they can alter the image of community colleges in the media and challenge students to construct a realistic portrayal of two-year institutions (Tucciarone, 2007).

Finally, only a few studies (Bourke et al., 2009; LaPaglia, 1994; Tucciarone, 2007) have examined the media's influence on two-year institutions, and two of the

studies (LaPaglia, 1994; Tucciarone, 2007) report similar findings while Bourke et al. (2009) found different results. LaPaglia (1994) and Tucciarone (2007) examined the media's representation of community colleges in fiction and movies, respectively, and found that community colleges possessed an inferior reputation. In contrast to their findings, Bourke et al. (2009) examined the forms of short fiction, fictional novels, television shows, and motion pictures and found that community colleges were portrayed positively for the most part. These researchers suggested that the examples they include in their content analysis illustrate that community colleges have a diverse student population with regard to student demographics. The fictional portrayals also provide an array of reasons as to why individuals continue their education at a community college. These reasons include self-improvement, increased earnings, career development, and academic studies (Bourke et al., 2009). Considering the socioeconomic status (SES) and various demographics of many community college students, the suggestion is that many attend two-year institutions because they are a means to a better life and assure increased lifetime earnings.

Despite the researchers' conflicting findings, Bourke et al. (2009) maintain that there are a number of media that include references to and episodes about community colleges and/or their students. However, the existent scholarship analyzing these references to two-year institutions is somewhat lacking. Tucciarone (2007) wrote that there is little existing research pertaining to popular culture's influence on the community college's image. As Bourke et al. (2009) and Tucciarone (2007) both suggest that there is a void in the scholarship pertaining to media portrayals involving community colleges,

there is a need to examine how community colleges are portrayed in the media as well as how these portrayals affect students' decisions to enroll in a two-year institution.

In examining how these institutions influence students' decisions to enroll in a specific type of institution, community college practitioners will have a better understanding as to how influential the media are. In addition, researchers as well as community college practitioners will also enhance their understanding of how media portrayals sway students to think about the community college differently or if these portrayals influence students to enroll in two-year institution. Researchers will be able to determine if individuals watch these portrayals actively or simply accept their messages and if students take note of the social injustices present in these media representations. In addition, researchers will determine the extent to which these media portrayals influence students' decisions and actions with regard to enrolling in a two-year institution. Considering the lack of scholarship that has been conducted in this area, the results of this study expand upon previous portrayals of two-year institutions in the media and link these portrayals with the attitudes and beliefs of individuals and whether these attitudes have any influence on students' intent to enroll (Tucciarone, 2007).

Definition of Terms

Adult education: Educational activities beyond compulsory school age.

Center for Media Literacy (CML): An educational organization that promotes media literacy to help individuals develop critical thinking and media literacy skills needed to understand media content (CML, 2011).

Community college: A two-year institution that confers associate degrees, both technical and academic.

College choice: A decision a student makes as he or she decides to attend a specific institution.

College set: A prospective student will compile of a list of possible institutions that he or she is interested in attending.

Critical media literacy: A form of literacy that “involves cultivating skills in analyzing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts” (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 372)

Critical pedagogy: “The educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action” (Giroux, 2010, para 1).

Critical theory: Any theory that works “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244).

Media: All print and electronic forms of media produced, including books, television shows, motion pictures, music recordings, and media clips.

Media education or media literacy education: A type of education that provides students with the skills to read, analyze, and synthesize media as they would other forms of media, i.e., print (Kellner & Share, 2005).

National Association for Media Literacy Education: A national organization dedicated to promoting media literacy education as a basic skill through critical thinking.

Non-traditional students: Students who are older than 24 years or age or who work full-time, raise a family, or attend part-time (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 1996).

Open admissions: Type of admission in which all applicants are accepted, regardless of academic ability.

First-generation college students: Students who are the first in their family to attend college.

Delimitations

This study was limited in scope to community colleges in the southern part of Mississippi. As a result, the findings of this study are not transferable to students enrolled in two-year institutions in other parts of Mississippi or other states.

Assumptions

This study will include the following assumptions:

1. All participants responded in a truthful manner to each interview item, and their responses were based on their knowledge and experiences.
2. All participants were enrolled for at least one semester in a community college prior to the date of the interview.
3. All participants possessed familiarity with and knowledge of media portrayals of community college students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

Community colleges have evolved to become comprehensive institutions that serve the needs of their communities. Two-year institutions have expanded access and provided higher educational opportunities through the establishment of conveniently located campuses, vocational programs, workforce development, remedial education, and continuing education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Thelin, 2004; Vaughan, 2006). As a result of the evolving community college mission coupled with open-access admissions, community colleges face an identity problem (Cowles, 1991; Thelin, 2004; Thelin & Townsend, 1988; Townsend, 1986). Unlike four-year institutions which are considered the norm in higher education, community colleges offer a different experience. In many cases, community colleges are considered commuter campuses, and faculty members are not required to publish (Brint & Karabel, 1989; LaPaglia, 1994; Thelin, 2004). Rather, community college faculty focus on student success through teaching and learning (Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Vaughan, 2006). The identity issue plaguing community colleges has resulted in a number of recent media portrayals in which producers and directors represent these two-year institutions negatively but in a manner in which individuals accept these portrayals and believe that community colleges and their students are inferior to four-year institutions and their students. Using critical media literacy skills, students must be taught to recognize these oppressive and demeaning portrayals and question if these portrayals are representative of actual community colleges and/or their students. More importantly, it is essential to determine

if community college students make decisions to enroll in community colleges based on media portrayals.

History of Community Colleges

Thelin (2004) pointed out that in 1890, many institutions of higher education began undertaking massive construction and expansion projects. This construction was symbolic of the growing public interest in these institutions but also provided increased access to the general public, as opposed to just the elites in society prior to this time. Other events also added to the American public's interest in attending college, which was due in large part to the increasing number of public secondary schools as well as returning armed force veterans (Beach, 2011; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Thelin, 2004). Alongside the growth of colleges and universities in America, a number of institutions were also established, including the two-year institution or the community college. In fact, the origins of the community college can be linked to William Rainey Harper who worked to allow high-school students the opportunity to earn college credit (Beach, 2011; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). J. Stanley Brown accepted Harper's proposal to offer advanced classification to Joliet Junior College students at the University of Chicago (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

As a result of this partnership, the first community college, Joliet Junior College, began offering classes in 1900 and offered a full curriculum a year later in 1901 (Beach, 2011; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). This institution was established to provide the first two years of college coursework as no one single institution could serve the people of the entire state (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Thelin (2004) and Cohen

and Brawer (2008) indicated that the success of two-year colleges was due to their locations and accessibility as they were conveniently situated in places where higher education opportunities were limited and even non-existent. For many students, access was linked to proximity; the community college was viewed as a neighborhood institution that increased access as it brought the opportunity for education to communities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Thelin 2004).

With increased accessibility, the popularity of two-year colleges increased as did the number of these institutions. Cohen and Brawer (2008) explained that the percentage of individuals graduating from high school increased significantly, from 45% in 1924 to 75% in 1960. The growth of secondary schools and increasing enrollments encouraged many students to continue their education. In 1910, only 5% of students enrolled in college, which increased to 45% by 1960 (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Although the first community college was established in 1901, lobbying at the state level in California began years before. In fact, the state of California began lobbying its state legislature for permission to allow high schools to offer college coursework in the late nineteenth century (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

While some states expanded existing four-year institutions to accommodate additional students, some leaders in society, notably Henry Tappan, William Mitchell, and William Folwell, felt as if a new institution was needed. These individuals felt as if this new institution should be responsible for the teaching of freshman and sophomore-level classes. If this model were implemented, universities would be able to focus on teaching upper-level classes and become research-intensive institutions (Beach, 2011; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). Cohen and Brawer (2008) explained

that in some cases, universities wanted to continue offering freshmen and sophomore classes. Even so, the community college assisted four-year universities in establishing selective admissions and only having to admit those freshman and sophomore students who met certain admission requirements. William Rainey Harper and others, including Edmund J. James, David Starr Jordan, and Alexis Lange, proposed that the U.S. should follow a model that was similar to the one in place in Europe in which universities are responsible for teaching higher-level academics while other postsecondary institutions teach vocational and general education courses to students through the age of 20.

Although this was just one suggestion, there were other ideas that were recommended. For example, Henry Barnard, John W. Burgess, William Rainey Harper, and Alexis Lange, suggested that the community college should be an extension of the high school. An extended high school would increase graduation rates and encourage students to continue their education. Under this proposal, the community college and high school would work together to offer academic and vocational coursework to prepare students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

One way in which high schools could expand is through what Brint and Karabel (1989) and Cohen and Brawer (2008) referred to as the 6-4-4 model. This model consisted of a six-year elementary school education, followed by a four-year middle-school education, and then a four-year high-school and community college education. Although this model had much opposition, Cohen and Brawer (2008) noted that LaGuardia Community College established Middle College High School, which consisted of a high school and a community college. Since its establishment, Cohen and Brawer (2008) indicated that over 30 of these institutions have been created. With regard

to this model, the teachers at the high school would be able to teach the community college courses and provide students with an easy transition from high school to community college. In addition to these advantages, there was another advantage as additional facilities did not have to be erected to accommodate the addition of the community college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

While this was just one way to establish community colleges, there were a variety of other ways that two-year institutions came into being. The state of California passed legislation that benefited these two-year institutions. Some notable legislation that assisted the development of community colleges in California included a 1907 law that allowed high schools to expand and offer the first two-years of coursework and a state law that allowed two-year institutions to be established independently of high schools. In other cases, four-year institutions, mainly private institutions that were struggling with regard to campus finances or low enrollment, became two-year private community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Cohen and Brawer (2008) maintained that this occurred in Missouri as well as in the southern states, while some community colleges in a number of states were established under the control of the federal government. In addition, a number of community colleges were also the result of some four-year public institutions organizing into community colleges in an attempt to increase their own enrollments (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

As the public became accepting of these institutions, enrollments increased. Thelin (2004) wrote that by the 1960s, one community college was opening each week, on average. In the state of California, community colleges were funded through taxes, usually through property taxes. As a result of this funding structure, these institutions

were often seen in a similar way as the public school system. In addition to this similarity, the leader of each institution was referred to as the superintendent of his or her respective institution. Not only do the similarities concern the leadership of the institution, but the faculty were also often referred to in a similar manner because instructors were recruited from the local community. Thelin (2004) wrote that the community college was an academic institution that offered a liberal arts curriculum that comprised the first two years of a bachelor's degree. Upon completing the first two years at a two-year institution, a student would transfer to a four-year institution. Brint and Karabel (1989) explicated that the creation of two-year institutions was an attempt to define the four-year university as a research-intensive institution and an attempt to cull out students from the institution, as only the most academically talented students would enroll and pursue a bachelor's degree.

History of Community Colleges in Mississippi

With the establishment of community colleges in several states, Mississippi legislators remained observant and understood how these institutions could expand opportunities for the state's residents and economy. In 1908, the state of Mississippi passed legislation that established agricultural high schools for White students. As a result of the 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the legislation was revised in 1910 to include agricultural high schools for both White and Black students. These agricultural high schools were located in rural areas and had dormitories for students. Although these schools did not charge tuition, they did charge board to students who lived on campus. However, students were able to earn money while working at the high school. The curriculum consisted of general academic courses, and there was an emphasis placed on

teaching the aspects of agriculture to boys, while girls received instruction in home economics (Fatherree, 2010).

Although these agricultural high schools provided education to many Mississippi residents for at least a decade, many of these schools saw declines in enrollment numbers when the Mississippi legislature passed legislation in 1916 that allowed schools to consolidate their institutions. The result was a reduced number of agricultural high schools, but there were now better schools in the state that were conveniently located. Students may have had to travel farther to these schools, but the schools provided buses to transport students (Fatherree, 2010).

As enrollments at agricultural high schools continued to decline, Robert E. Sutherland and James A. Huff had an idea to increase enrollment at these high schools and to make college more accessible. They proposed the idea of an agricultural high school junior college. In addition to its current high school offerings, agricultural high school junior colleges would be allowed to offer college coursework (Fatherree, 2010). After passage of Senate Bill 251, these agricultural high school junior colleges became popular institutions in Mississippi for nearly 30 years. Pearl River Agricultural High School (PRAHS) and Hinds County Agricultural High school began, in the case of PRAHS—continued, offering college classes during the 1922-1923 academic year (Fatherree, 2010; Young & Ewing, 1978). Holmes County Agricultural High School and Harrison-Stone Agricultural High School began offering classes in 1925-1926, and a year later in 1926-1927, Sunflower County Agricultural High School followed suit. In the next two years, Kemper County Agricultural High School, Jones County Agricultural High School, and Tate County Agricultural High School, Copiah-Lincoln Agricultural

High School, New County Agricultural High School, and Pike County Agricultural High School added college coursework to their curriculum (Young & Ewing, 1978). Young and Ewing (1978) wrote that these eleven institutions constituted the community college system in Mississippi, and this system remained largely the same for nearly 20 years. However, Meridian Community College was added in 1937, and this was the only community college in the state that did not originate as an agricultural high school (Fatherree, 2010).

As a system of community colleges was in place, Young and Ewing (1978) contend that there was need for a state governing entity or structure. Young and Ewing (1978) explicated that state legislation, specifically Senate Bill 131, established the Commission of Junior Colleges in 1928, which was significant as this was the first community college board in the nation (Fatherree, 2010). The members of the board included the chancellor of the University of Mississippi, the president of Mississippi State University, the president of the Mississippi State College for Women, the leaders of three public junior colleges, and the state superintendent of public education (Young & Ewing, 1978).

Along with the need for a state governing board, there was also a need for state appropriations for community colleges, and the state passed House Bill 263 in 1928, which gave \$85,000 to community colleges to be split among the agricultural community colleges. Years later in 1930, the state appropriations would double to \$170,000, while the state appropriations for agricultural high schools remained relatively unchanged. However, state appropriations for community colleges would be reduced to \$115,000 as a result of the Great Depression. Prior to passage of House Bill 263, agricultural high

schools were funded by taxes that were levied on local residents in support of these agricultural high schools (Young & Ewing, 1978). Young and Ewing (1978) wrote that the taxes could not exceed two mills but the tax was increased to three mills, with the exception of the Gulf Coast district which could levy taxes at four mills for maintenance and operation expenses.

With funding and governance, community colleges in Mississippi were operational, although they were not without their challenges. One major obstacle that these institutions had to overcome was the fear that others would want to establish community colleges, thereby diminishing the strength and support of the current system (Fatherree, 2010; Young & Ewing, 1978). In fact, Fatherree (2010) suggested that at least 25 agricultural high schools were working toward expanding their curricula to include college coursework. As an action was needed to limit the number of community colleges, Young and Ewing (1978) wrote that the Commission was forward-thinking and implemented a preventative measure that established zones that were based on high-school statistics (graduates and enrollment), taxable property, tax levy, reasonable facilities, teaching loads, and teacher salaries. Fatherree (2010) noted that to prevent an overabundance of community colleges, the state passed legislation in 1928 that established 13 districts in the state, and there could only be one community college in each of the districts. Together, these 13 districts would serve all of Mississippi's counties (Young & Ewing, 1978).

In 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president of the United States, and he created a number of initiatives that benefitted Mississippi community college. He allocated money that would serve as matching grants to state money as long as

community colleges used these funds for construction purposes, and he implemented measures that defined the community college as a community-based institution. In addition to these initiatives, he also implemented the National Youth Administration (NYA), which created part-time jobs for community college students, established a NYA on each community college campus, financed the construction of new buildings, and paid for many campus renovations (Young & Ewing, 1978).

During 1939, the NYA program was transferred to the Federal Security Agency and eventually become part of the War Manpower Commission whose goal was to provide war-related training, which consisted of training in metal, machinery, and woodworking. The program ended in 1944, but the state's community colleges received the equipment that was used to train these individuals, which they would use once vocational and career training became part of the community colleges' offerings. In 1942, the Mississippi legislature appropriated \$60,000 for establishing vocational programs in community colleges, and soon after, the NYA program gave the state's community colleges equipment and machinery to use in vocational programs. Community college leaders felt that it was important to establish community college education and expand program offerings because veterans were returning from the war and using G. I. Bill benefits to pay for their college coursework. At the same time, Mississippi was experiencing a period of expansion with regard to its industry, and there was a need for skilled laborers, which provided employment opportunities for a number of veterans (Young & Ewing, 1978).

As a result of World War II, student enrollment at Mississippi's community colleges fell dramatically, from 4,074 students to 1,375 in less than two years (Young &

Ewing, 1978). Young and Ewing (1978) described that war-related activities, such as military drill and ceremonies, were visible on community college campuses and that new technical programs were added to the curriculum to support the war effort. With the end of the war, veterans began returning, and community colleges assisted in accommodating these individuals. Housing was a concern for many veterans, and to assist with housing needs, community colleges expanded their dormitories to provide additional housing for the returning veterans. Much of this expansion was funded by the Federal Public Housing Act, which also provided temporary surplus housing or barracks that would be transferred to the campuses. The community colleges could use these buildings at their discretion, whether for instructional purposes or housing needs. Although the college had received these temporary facilities, they were not effective in meeting long-term growth, and in 1950, community colleges received \$750,000 for construction purposes. A few years later, the state appropriated \$1.5 million for the construction of additional facilities (Young & Ewing, 1978).

In 1941, Mississippi decided to add two districts to the original 13, thus adding an additional agricultural high school-junior college in each of the two districts, but this did not occur until seven years later. In 1948, Itawamba County Agricultural High School and Prentiss County Agricultural High School added college coursework. One year later in 1949, Coahoma County Agricultural High School was established for Black students. Also in 1946, Utica began as an agricultural high school and added college studies in 1954-1955 but combined their operations with Hinds Community College in 1982 (Fatherree, 2010; Young & Ewing, 1978). Although these two community colleges combined, Hinds still operates the Utica campus today (Fatherree, 2010). In 1950, a law

was passed that established several measures, but most importantly, it separated the agricultural high schools from community colleges, thereby removing agricultural high schools from the campuses of community colleges (Young & Ewing, 1978). Fourteen years later in 1964, House Bill 215 reemphasized what previous legislation had accomplished as it recognized “thirteen multicounty district junior colleges in Mississippi, approved three additional junior colleges within these districts and authorized any junior college district to operate additional attendance centers within the district” (Young & Ewing, 1978, p. 43). In addition to these measures, House Bill 215 also successfully gained the support of the county boards of supervisors who continued to support these institutions with tax levies (Young & Ewing, 1978).

Community College Mission

With a community college system serving all areas of the state, Mississippi became a model for other states to emulate. The state, like others in the nation, would encounter a number of obstacles, from names and terminology to programs, in their development. Since the establishment of Joliet Junior College in 1901, two-year institutions were referred to as “junior colleges,” and this name reflected the idea that two-year institutions were junior to senior institutions and illustrated the mission of two-year institutions (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Thelin, 2004). Cohen and Brawer (2008) contended that the term “junior college” was often used to refer to private universities’ lower levels, church-supported two-year institutions, or independently organized two-year institutions. Furthermore, they noted that the term “community college” came into existence later and was used to refer to the comprehensive, public two-year institution. By the 1970s, the term “community college” was used to refer to both public and private

two-year institutions (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Brint and Karabel (1989) posited that the Commission of Seven, a group composed largely of university administrators who stated the primary purpose of two-year institutions was vocationalization as well as the President's Commission on Higher Education (Truman Commission), a commission composed of 28 members who proposed the expansion of higher educational opportunities for all, both critiqued the name "junior college." Brint and Karabel (1989) stated that the Truman Commission suggested that the junior college change its name to community college to reflect its terminal program offerings, and Cohen and Brawer (2008) suggested that these career and vocational programs have been part of the community college since its founding. Eells (1941) maintained that William Rainey Harper was among the first supporters of the community college who encouraged these institutions to embrace terminal education. He encouraged community colleges to embrace this type of training because he did not believe that all community college students would succeed at a four-year institution.

Despite the Truman Commission's, the Commission of Seven's, and Harper's recommendations concerning terminal education, the name change from "junior college" to "community college" did not occur until decades later (Thelin, 2004). Thelin (2004) believed that the two-year institution's name change from junior college to community college was an accurate reflection of the community college due to the evolution of its mission. The junior college had transformed into a comprehensive institution that served the needs of a community as it offered an array of classes and programs. While the name change was reflective of the institution's mission, Brint and Karabel (1989) explained that most college personnel embraced the term because it no longer suggested the two-

year college's inferior position with regard to four-year institutions and helped others to see them as independent institutions.

Since their inception, community colleges have often been referred to in a manner which reflects their sponsor and mission (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Explaining this concept, Cohen and Brawer (2008) explicated that the names of two-year institutions often reflect their sponsorship or leadership of the college. The names of these institutions may include city college, county college, and/or branch college, while words such as technical institute, technical, vocational, workforce development, and adult education center reflect its mission. Over time, in addition to these more official names, two-year institutions have assumed a number of nicknames, including the people's college or democracy's college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). In addition to these nicknames, the community college has also been termed a contradictory college (Dougherty, 1994). The two-year institution expands access to higher education for many, but it does a poor job in helping students earn a bachelor's degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Dougherty, 1994). In fact, Dougherty (1994) cited that of the students who enter a community college, only 20% of those students will earn a bachelor's degree.

As the success of these institutions grew, particularly in the 1930s, four-year institutions viewed them as a formidable competitor in enrolling students. As four-year institutions realized that the community college had detracted from their attendance numbers, they pressured community colleges into moving toward a curriculum that emphasized vocational and technical training, as opposed to its founding mission that focused on liberal arts or academic studies (Thelin, 2004). Describing the mission of the two-year college, Thelin (2004) discussed

Providing recreational or community-interest courses—with or without degree credit—ascended as an option. Continuing education and certification for a variety of business and professional fields constituted another attractive domain. To another extreme, the community college frequently took on remedial education. And the community college's most incongruous and interesting innovation was to offer advanced courses that provided retooling for applicants who already had bachelor's or master's degrees. (pp. 332-333)

The two-year college's mission evolved over time, from strictly an academic institution that offered the first two years of coursework to a more comprehensive institution that included programs that emphasized vocational and technical education (Thelin, 2004). In addition to these offerings, community colleges added additional courses in response to their communities' needs. Individuals could enroll to pursue professional certificates, developmental education, or technology training.

Although Thelin (2004) maintained that the community college mission evolved over time, Cohen and Brawer (2008) argued that vocational education was part of the community college's purpose since shortly after its inception. It was not until 1957 that a state passed legislation that funded vocational education; at the same time, these career-oriented programs were considered terminal programs of study. Brint and Karabel (1989) contended that although supporters argued for vocationalization of community colleges, it was not until the 1970s that this movement gained support. As support increased, enrollments in vocational programs increased, especially at a time when the job market was oversaturated with college graduates, although this was not the sole contributor in expanding vocational and technical program offerings.

Another factor that increased support for vocationalization was that community colleges recruited adult and part-time students who were looking to prepare for immediate employment opportunities. The push for vocational and technical programs was also motivated in part by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. This commission supported the idea of a comprehensive community college as an institution that could serve two functions, specifically reducing the number of students enrolled in four-year institutions and increasing the number of students enrolled in vocational programs at two-year institutions. In addition to the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, the Nixon-Education Amendment Act of 1972 provided financial support for vocational programs (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Cohen and Brawer (2008) suggested that an array of influences, including the need for trained workers, the extended period of adolescence, and the push for equal rights of minorities contributed to the development of today's community college.

Competition among two-year and four-year institutions also increased the need for additional programs. Weisbord et al., (2008) indicated that many changes in higher education are due to competition for state funds as well as competition for students. Community colleges, in competition with four-year institutions, became more diverse in their offerings and programs to appeal to more individuals who potentially may be interested in continuing their education (Weisbrod et al., 2008). Describing the mission of today's community college, Vaughan (2006) illustrated

The mission of most community colleges is shaped by these commitments:

Serving all segments of society through an open access admissions policy that offers equal and fair treatment for all students, providing a comprehensive

educational program, serving the community as a community-based institution of higher education, teaching and learning, fostering lifelong learning. (p. 3)

Today's community colleges offer a variety of courses and programs to meet the needs of their students and their local communities. Weisbrod et al., (2008) discussed that competition in the marketplace has encouraged community colleges to expand their offerings to appeal to more students. Offering workforce and vocational training allows community colleges to pursue students who want to enter the workforce quickly in order to increase their income. At the same time, community colleges are able to expand access and choice to students not interested in earning a four-year degree (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Hallmarks of Community Colleges

Open access. Describing the rationale behind the community college's open-access attendance policy, Vaughan (2006) wrote, "Open access to higher education, as practiced by the community college is a manifestation of the belief that a democracy can thrive, indeed survive, only if people are educated to their fullest potential" (p. 4). For Vaughan (2006), open access is related to equity as the tuition of community colleges is affordable, thus allowing all who wish to attend the opportunity to enroll in institutions of higher education. This attendance policy allows equal access to individuals who otherwise may be unable to attend due to financial constraints and/or academic ability as well as non-traditional students (Dougherty, 1994). Vaughan (2006) contended that open access also includes choice and convenience with regard to locations, services, programs, classes, and so forth.

Comprehensive community college. Vaughan (2006) emphasized that community colleges must offer comprehensive programs including academic, vocational, technical, workforce development, and community education courses and programs. By contrast, Nevarez and Wood (2010) implied that the primary role of today's community college is its academic studies or transfer programs. Vaughan (2006) stated that the idea of a comprehensive community college is closely related to open access and equity as students must have a choice to enter academic or vocational programs and cannot be limited with regard to one or the other, as doing so diminishes the college's open-access admissions policy and equity.

Community-based. Community colleges serve the needs of the community in which they are located. Cohen and Brawer (2008) explained that the community-based component of the mission originated as private two-year institutions were centers of enlightenment for their local areas. This community-based mission involved providing cultural and recreational classes or opportunities for local residents (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Nevarez and Wood (2010) maintained that a community college's offerings should meet the "human, social, and cultural capital of their communities" (p. 6). Part of being a community-based organization means that community colleges must offer an array of programs, which may include academic, vocational, workforce development, continuing education, recreational classes, and/or special-interest courses.

Teaching and learning. Nevarez and Wood (2010) posited that community colleges were established to allow four-year institutions to focus on research; therefore, the focus of two-year institutions is on effective instruction. This means that faculty at community colleges focus on teaching and student learning, which includes delivering

instruction effectively to students with diverse learning styles (Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Vaughan, 2006). Vaughan (2006) indicated that while publishing is not a requirement for community college faculty, faculty members at two-year institutions should stay current with developments in their field.

Lifelong learning. Now, more than ever, education spans an individual's life time. Vaughan (2006) noted that there has been an increase in the number of individuals who return to pursue studies at the community college after they have earned a graduate or professional degree. Nevarez and Wood (2010) suggested that this role will continue to increase as students realize the necessity of staying competitive in the workplace. One way individuals remain competitive in the workforce is to enroll in community college to retool their current skills as well as to learn new skills, especially with regard to career and technology. Nevarez and Wood (2010) also stated that this particular component of the community college is linked to the other components of a community college's mission, which focus on assisting and enabling students to achieve success as they pursue their career and academic goals.

Overview of Community Colleges

As college tuition increases, students look for more affordable alternatives, and in fact, nearly half of recent high-school graduates as well as those over the age of 24 begin their studies at a community college, which reflects the popularity of these institutions (Weisbrod et al., 2008). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2014), there are 1,132 community colleges in the nation. Of these, 986 are public institutions, 115 are independent institutions, and 31 are tribal institutions. Together, these community colleges enroll 45% of all undergraduate students, which

equated to 12.8 million students enrolled in these institutions during the fall 2012 semester (AACC, 2013; AACC, 2014). Sixty percent of students attend community colleges on a part-time basis while 40% attend on a full-time basis. The average age of community college students is 28. Thirty percent of community college students are under the age of 21, 57% are between the ages of 22 and 39 while 14% are 40 years of age and older. A larger percentage of females (57%) are enrolled at community colleges than are males (43%). Fifty-one percent of all community college students are White, 19% are Hispanic, 14% are Black, 6% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% is Native American, and 8% are other (biracial, nonresident, etc.) or unknown (AACC, 2014).

Just as there is a diverse student composition with regard to demographics at two-year institutions, there is also a variety of reasons as to why students begin their studies at community colleges. Thirty-six percent of all community college students are first-generation college students, while 17% are single parents (AACC, 2014). For those who are single parents as well as those individuals who have spouses, community colleges allow individuals to raise a family and work to provide for their children and/or their families while they complete coursework and earn an education. For these students, the community college is convenient as it is a local institution. Townsend (1986) expressed the idea that the community college meets the needs of non-traditional students in that it extends access to all and focuses on teaching. Students who wish to continue their education but have been out of school for an extended period of time may be in need of remediation or developmental education before completing additional studies. She noted that this also may be the case with students who have not succeeded previously in the classroom (Townsend, 1986). Cohen and Brawer (2008) pointed out that offering

development education classes at the community college occurred after the quality of American secondary schools decreased in the 1960s.

Enrollment, Persistence, and Retention

Enrollment trends. Nevarez and Wood (2010) contended that the number of ethnic minority students is rising with regard to community college students. They attributed this finding to a number of factors, including that the enrollment at community colleges is becoming more diverse and reflective of the nation's population. In addition to having a student population that mirrors that of the nation, community colleges have open-access policies coupled with a welcoming environment. As students feel welcomed, Nevarez and Wood (2010) maintained that there are opportunities for students to grow socially and culturally while preparing for economic opportunities that may await them after graduation. The authors (2010) also indicated that another factor for increased diversity among racial ethnicities concerns the affordability with regard to tuition and fees of two-year institutions. As community colleges are located in close proximity to residential areas, students have the opportunity to live at home, thereby saving money on housing expenses (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Persistence and retention. As persistence and retention are problematic for two-year institutions, O'Gara, Karp, and Hughes (2009) examined the effectiveness of student-support courses at community colleges in an attempt to offer suggestions to help community colleges improve with regard to these areas. The goal of these types of courses is to help entering students who are unfamiliar with the institution to gain an awareness of the services that are available to students to help them achieve success. Students may learn through an initial orientation or from a friend about career services,

basic introductory information, and/or study skill information at the institution. The researchers (2009) found that participation in a student success course was a positive experience for students and an effective way to introduce students to their new institution. In addition to this finding, they also found that these courses were an effective way to improve persistence among students. In particular, students said they benefitted as they improved their study skills and knowledge about the college. As the students increased their knowledge about student services that were available to them, they were more likely to make use of these services. The researchers' recommendation was that all students enrolled in a community college should be required to complete an orientation-type course that welcomes students to the institution and introduces them to the various services that are available (O'Gara et al., 2009).

McKinney and Novak (2013) found that first-year community college students who completed and filed the Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) resulted in a higher percentage of students who attended the fall and spring semesters. McKinney and Novak (2013) found that part-time students were 77% less likely to persist while students who filed a FAFSA were 79% more likely to attend both fall and spring semesters. The implications of this finding suggested that community colleges must encourage students to complete the FAFSA prior to their enrollment because they become eligible to receive reduced tuition and other financial aid awards. If students fail to submit the FAFSA, they are not eligible to receive many forms of financial aid. This means that students may have to work while attending college in order to pay their tuition and related expenses. The researchers (2013) discussed that those community college students who do not file the FAFSA usually share similar characteristics. These individuals tend to be older than

23 and to be part-time students. In addition, these individuals tend to come from a low SES and live independently of a parent or guardian (McKinny & Novak, 2013).

As part of their study, McKinny and Novak (2013) also examined how completing and failing to complete the FAFSA predicted persistence among community college students between semesters. Students who delayed their enrollment or did not enroll in a two-year institution immediately following their high school graduation were less likely to persist than students who enrolled upon completing high school. The strongest predictor of student persistence was whether or not the student had completed the FAFSA. Those students who did complete the application did have higher persistence when compared with students who did not file the application for financial aid, and this finding was regardless of student enrollment status, whether a full-time or part-time student. The researchers (2013) also found that a student's high-school grade point average (GPA) was not a reliable predictor, but they contend that a student's college GPA and meetings with an advisor are strong predictors of persistence (McKinny & Novak, 2013). Students who had low GPAs as well as those students who did not enroll in the community college immediately following their high school graduation resulted in lower persistence, so these are considered weak predictors. However, the researchers (2013) pointed out that the quality of the advising sessions are key, as are the frequency of these sessions (McKinny & Novak, 2013).

With regard to adult students, Capps (2012) found that advisors were very influential to community college students. In fact, students who had negative experiences with advisors were less likely to remain enrolled in college. The researchers (2012) reported that students who had negative experiences often felt as if their advisor was too

busy or presented a rather dismissive attitude. As far as the students' attitudes toward the nonacademic or social aspects of attending a community college, most students did not express that they possessed or felt a connection to the their institution, but they stated that they had a number of relationships with the people of the institution. For example, the students reported that instructors were most influential in the lives of students when they created an atmosphere that nurtured adult students. The students also reported that those teachers who helped them understand the material and were patient with them as they attempted to learn were often memorable figures. Many of the students expressed that they did not feel as if they were a part of the community college to the same extent they would have if they had chosen to attend a four-year college. The students reported that if they had attended a four-year college they would be more likely to attend activities on campus and attend class in crowded classrooms (Capps, 2012).

College Choice Models

After enrolling in an institution, students usually discover whether they have selected the most appropriate institution for their needs. It is generally helpful to students if they start the college choice process early, evaluate their options, and decide which college or university to attend. College choice refers to the decision-making process of prospective college students who must choose which institution to attend. Chapman (1981) explicated that the purpose of his college choice model is two-fold:

The model is intended to (1) assist college administrators responsible for setting recruitment policy to identify the pressures and influences they need to consider in developing institutional recruiting policy and (2) aid continued research in the area of student college choice. (p. 490)

Chapman (1981) contended that a student's college choice is influenced by a combination of student factors and influences. The influences consist of three categories. The first category is composed of meaningful individuals, while the second category involves fixed-college characteristics. The third category involves the provision of college information including campus visits, publications, and recruitment. He theorized that both student factors as well as influences are shaped by what the student expects of his or her college experience.

In the first component of his model, student factors, Chapman (1981) included SES, aptitude, educational expectation, educational aspiration, high-school performance, and meaningful individuals' influence. The second category includes external factors and fixed college characteristics, which contains items that students have little, if any, control over. Such items include cost, financial aid, location, and program availability. The third component includes college communication and information, which includes campus visits and recruitment materials. This component encompasses marketing and promotional materials that are used while a prospective student is examining different colleges he or she may attend. Chapman (1981) maintained that together the consideration of these three components will be beneficial to colleges as they attempt to market their institutions to increase enrollments by reaching out and appealing to prospective students.

Jackson's (1982) model provided another model of college choice. This particular model is a combination of economic and sociology factors, and it describes how a student's aspirations and academic achievement can influence a student's college decision. The first step of his model is preference, which he contended is influenced by a

student's achievement, aspiration, background, and context. The second step of the model he proposed is exclusion whereby students may omit or exclude colleges on the basis of financial means, knowledge, and/or academics. The third and final phase of the model Jackson (1982) proposed is evaluation during which a student looks at his or her options and rates his or her choices, which are heavily influenced by college choice and future benefits. However, he advised that throughout the college selection process, more emphasis should be placed on a student's academic achievement and preparation as a means to increase enrollment. He maintained that if more attention is placed on a student's academic preparation, students would be better prepared to pursue careers in college. Therefore, Jackson's (1982) model suggested that academics and aspirations affect college choice and career expectations.

If researchers can explain the factors that influence college choice, institutions would be able to develop more effective marketing materials for prospective students. Describing the difficulties that institutions often face, Litten (1982) wrote:

The marketing challenges presented by imminent and long-term demographic and economic conditions lead these persons to believe that a better understanding of the college selection process will help them manage an institution's involvement in these processes more effectively. (p. 383)

Litten (1982) argued that the problem with Chapman's models of college choice is that they are too "highly generalized – they purport to present a *basic* model of influences on college attendance and selection" (p. 384). Litten (1982) indicated that the problem that manifests when marketing materials and recruitment activities are based on models that are very general is that recruitment efforts are not as effective compared to when they are

addressed to specific groups. In fact, he maintained that these models tend to ignore any differences that exist between those individuals who comprise the groups. At the same time, Litten (1982) postulated that it is important to know if there are differences that exist between groups, but he also stated it is more cost-efficient to mass-produce materials directed at a large number of individuals than it is to produce materials that highlight the concerns of individuals with different needs. At the same time, the goal for institutions is to appeal to prospective students through recruitment materials while illustrating and showcasing the college services available to individuals with different needs and concerns.

Despite the importance of understanding differences between groups, Litten (1982) suggested that college choice is a process, as opposed to specific outcomes, as Chapman's (1981) model proposes. Therefore, Litten (1982) focused on "the college choice *process* and personal and social phenomena that affect the way it is *conducted*" (p. 384). In reviewing previously published studies on college choice, Litten (1982) found that the various races approach decisions regarding college choice and the college selection process much differently. He noted that Blacks examine more schools than do Whites but attributes this to institutions' affirmative action programs or even to a race that includes fewer individuals who are knowledgeable of the college-going process. He also observed that Blacks value personal contacts as a source of information regarding college (Litten, 1982).

Also, in reviewing the literature, Litten (1982) observed that the same strategies can be used to successfully recruit both males and females to an institution, though one notable difference is that women move through the college choice process more quickly

than do their male counterparts. While Litten (1982) explained that gender was not that influential with regard to college choice, he stated that it is not surprising that colleges and universities pursue academically talented high-school students. Likewise, it is not surprising that many of these high-school students begin their college search at an earlier date and examine more colleges and universities than do most high-school students prior to making their decision as to which institution they will attend.

Another influential factor in a student's decision concerning college is the educational level of a student's parents. Litten (1982) detailed that students whose parents were educated were a valuable source of information with regard to the student's college decisions. As a result of their parents' knowledge, students relied less on their high-school faculty and staff for information pertaining to college. Also, prospective college students whose parents were educated were more likely to make visits to the campuses of institutions in which they had interest and were more likely to consult secondary reading material pertaining to those institutions.

Combining the ideas of Litten (1982) and Jackson (1982) pertaining to the factors that influence college decisions, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) developed a three-step model which consists of predisposition, search, and choice. In predisposition, the first phase, students decide, on their own and in talking with their high-school teachers, counselors, and parents, if they will pursue higher education before they enter the search phase, the second phase. During the second phase, students develop a choice set, a list of colleges and universities to which the students will apply. This phase is the one in which institutions have the most influence on potential and prospective students. The choice phase, also the third and last phase, occurs as the student takes all of the college

information into consideration and selects the institution that he or she will attend. In the third phase, the college has some influence, though not as much influence as the institution has during the search phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

While institutional perception is not part of the college choice process, the manner in which an institution is depicted in the media may influence a student's decision to attend a certain type of institution or a specific college or university. If students have not received training with regard to media education, they are more likely to assume that the fictional portrayals are factual and accurately reflect the institution. So, the student's perception of these institutions, due in part to the media, may influence his or her decision to enroll in a specific type of institution. If students perceive that they, as community college students, may be demeaned and belittled by society, students possibly may decide to attend an institution other than a two-year institution, which this study sought to determine. In addition to how perceptive students are about the media and the degree to which they believe these portrayals, students may also be influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of others, as Chapman (1981) suggested that meaningful or significant others are one of the influences that affect students' college decisions. Also, Jackson (1982) maintained students' knowledge also influences students as they make decisions concerning which college to attend. In other words, students may be influenced by their previous knowledge of colleges and universities as well as other individuals' knowledge and values, which may affect the student's own beliefs.

Theoretical Framework/Critical Media Literacy

Although a variety of factors may influence students' decisions to attend a specific type of institution, students, if knowledgeable of critical media literacy, will be

able to make an educated and informed decision regarding their college decision. These students will realize that community college is not as it is portrayed on television and in the movies. Instead, students will realize that the social injustices that are present within the student population of community colleges are the result of the demographics of their student bodies and the types of students they enroll (AACC, 2014; Shiffman, 2014).

Furthermore, students will recognize that the media do not work to oppress these students but rather reinforce negative images of common stereotypes, which are examples of social injustice, that are often associated with the community college and its students.

These images represent what the public knows about community colleges, which explains why these negative images are constantly reproduced (Tisdell, 2007). As the basis of critical media literacy instructs students to look for oppression, it can be linked to critical theory, which forms its origins and emerged with the Frankfurt School in the 1920s. In addition to Max Horkheimer, other members of the Frankfurt School include Leo Lowenthal, Thodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse. The members of the Frankfurt School critiqued a variety of subjects, including culture, economics, and media. (Hoeschsmann & Poyntz, 2012; Semali, 2000). Kellner (1995) mentioned that the Frankfurt theorists were among the first to criticize the mass media within the theoretical framework of critical theory. Since the term “critical theory” was first introduced, Kellner (1995), Kellner and Share (2005), and Semali (2000) expressed the idea that a number of fields, including feminist, Marxist, critical race, and multicultural studies have emerged that examine oppression among groups in society. Like critical media literacy, these disciplines are “weapons of critique in the struggle for a more humane society that

sees ideology as providing theoretical underpinnings for systems of domination” (Semali, 2000, p. 83).

Cultural Influence

Even though critical theory developed within the Frankfurt School, the initial movement toward media education is credited to F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson. Hoeschsmann and Poyntz (2012) posited that these literary scholars addressed the moral corruption of individuals, especially those of the working class, who were interested in cultural entertainment and how individuals conceptualized the media. Leavis and Thompson formulated a protectionist approach to shield children from the media, thereby safeguarding and preserving the innocence that is often associated with the state of childhood (Hoeschsmann & Poyntz, 2012; Masterman, 1985). Supporters of this approach advocated that children should only be exposed to materials that provided for a “rich cultural life,” namely classical music, painting, and literature (Hoeschsmann & Poyntz, 2012, p. 37).

With the founding of Hollywood in the late nineteenth century and growth of the motion picture industry in the United States during the early twentieth century, Hoeschsmann and Poyntz (2012) contended that a sort of cultural expansion manifested due to the production of the mass media. Adorno and Horkheimer were two notable critics who were not satisfied with the popular forms of movies and music (Hoeschsmann & Poyntz, 2012). As a result of their discontentment with these media, they critiqued the effects of mass media or what they referred to as the “commoditization of culture” because it “threatened to undermine rich and autonomous forms of cultural life” (Hoeschsmann & Poyntz, 2012, p. 37). They believed that the various forms of media

(movies, music, etc.) inevitably would lead to a capitalist society that did not value individual thought but promoted one common experience that was shared by all. In addition, the German theorists felt as if the media would even divert individuals' attention from real-life issues (Hoeschsmann & Poyntz, 2012). The implication is that the media constructs and conveys messages about community colleges and tells individuals what they should think and value, which results in everyone possessing the same feelings regarding community college students. In other words, individuals are unaccustomed to formulating their own thoughts, and the same is true with regard to media portrayals of community colleges in which a message is conveyed as individuals accept the message that is imparted without questioning its accuracy.

First Meeting of Media Educators

As the production of media continued to proliferate, Peters (1961) wrote *Teaching about Film*. He discussed that educators and teachers from different parts of the world needed to share with other educators their teaching methods that incorporated critical strategies that they used to teach the media. Also, he proposed that a meeting was needed to determine if these instructional methods used to teach television media differed from the pedagogical approaches that were being used to teach studies in other disciplines, such as cinema. He felt this meeting was necessary as he acknowledged the widespread appeal and powerful effect of television as a form of mass media. He also noted that the images and storylines portrayed on television were not a true reflection of reality as the importance of morals, culture, religion, and family were not portrayed accurately (Peters, 1961). A meeting similar to what Peters proposed was held a year later in Norway at the International Meeting on Film and Television Teaching, sponsored by the International

Center of Films for Children and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Hodgkinson, 1964). The seven recommendations that emerged from this meeting concerned school curriculum, out-of-the classroom media, televised media, required materials, teacher training, and future development.

With regard to the first recommendation regarding school curriculum, those present at the meeting suggested that school curriculum needed to incorporate media studies, teach children media viewing skills during their earliest years, and continue with this work throughout their lives (Hodgkinson, 1964). In addition to incorporating media education into the school curriculum, those present at the meeting recommended that media education was needed in society, and as individuals in society accepted the idea of media education, there would be a call for high-quality television programs. The third recommendation concerned educating individuals with regard to televised media. Primarily, the aim of this recommendation was to help viewers analyze the content of televised media, to encourage viewers to exert selectivity when viewing televised media, to help viewers exert good judgment in order to benefit from the media, and to assist individuals in upholding truth, morals, and values while viewing the media. The fourth recommendation pertained to the required materials needed for studies in media education. The required primary materials are films as well as television programs. Secondary materials that assist individuals in analyzing media content include film extracts, television summaries, film documentaries, slide series, and interviews. Teacher training was the topic of the fifth recommendation. Individuals present at the meeting stated that professional development was needed for current teachers as well as for those preparing to become teachers, and the recommendation was that they should complete a

course in media education. Also, individuals at the meeting recommended that those preparing to become teachers should be allowed to specialize in media studies if they so wished. In a similar fashion, recommendation six suggested that media education should become a mainstay in higher education as universities should offer courses in media education at the undergraduate level and allow graduate students to complete a series of courses for an emphasis or concentration in media studies or methods. The seventh and final recommendation concerned future developments in media studies on an international level. Possibilities included the exchange of ideas via a study abroad for experts in media studies to spend time in another country or for an expert to educate the teachers of a country that is not as advanced with regard to media education. Other recommendations concerned establishing an international center for media studies as well as introducing this field of study into an international university (Hodgkinson, 1964).

U.S. Developments

Alongside the development of Hollywood, discussion of media literacy in the United States accelerated in the 1920s and continued into the 1930s when high schools and post-secondary institutions began offering film and cinema classes. These classes introduced the concepts of a critical viewer and a critical audience. The number of critical viewers as well as the size of the critical audience increased once televisions were manufactured, beginning in the 1930s and continuing in the following decades (Brown, 1991). Although Hollywood played a key role in developing mass media and in creating a critical audience, John Culkin, who worked to create a media-literate citizenry, is often credited with the introduction of critical media theory in the United States (Moody,

2011). Illustrating the influential nature of films in shaping opinions, Culkin (1964) described

At their best, films communicate valid and significant human experiences which illuminate our common humanity and which we should want to share with our students. At their worst, and they share this fault with all media, they present a dehumanizing view of (sic) [*sic*] man against which the best defense is trained intelligence and aesthetic judgment. The power of the moving image to manipulate, to editorialize and to form values and attitudes makes it imperative in this age of film and television that the audience be equipped with the competence needed to understand the rhetoric of the projected image. (para. 2)

As Culkin (1964) indicated, films as well as other forms of popular culture have the power to transmit messages that shape the attitudes, beliefs, and values of its viewers. Thus, as long as a film is convincing, audiences tend to be drawn into its message. The idea of participating, even if inactively and subconsciously, can trace its roots to the German theorist Adorno (1978, 1991). He argued that popular culture promotes the hegemonic or prevailing culture and exerts control over the public in an unconscious manner. As these messages contained within the media are conveyed, individuals who receive these messages as viewers and consumers do not always think about the value of or veracity contained within the messages. Rather, they just accept the messages without questioning them. Then, the media have successfully earned the support of many individuals who have allowed their unconscious to exert control over their ability to reason (Adorno, 1978, 1991).

First Media Projects in the U.S.

Hall (1980) cited that the first media project, funded by Rowntree trust, examined social change and the popular press during the 1930s-1960s, and he stated that the second funded project consisted of an analysis of television crime drama. In addition to these two funded projects, there are two other noteworthy studies that Hall (1980) discussed. The first project Hall (1980) mentioned was a doctoral dissertation that analyzed how females were represented in advertising. Hall (1980) stated that the second project analyzed women's magazines, namely *Woman* and *Woman's Own*, to examine the way in which women and femininity were portrayed. After the publication of these initial research projects, Hall (1980) stated a shift occurred from research about media analysis to political communication, specifically to news and current events. He maintained that there appeared to be a sort of media crisis that emerged with regard to credibility, bias, and distortion. These issues surfaced with regard to the media's role in society (Hall, 1980).

Landmark Media Developments in the U.S.

Although the origins of media literacy can be traced back to the 1920s and 1930s in the United States, little had been done in terms of moving the nation toward a definition of media literacy and/or media literacy education, even as late as the 1990s. Prior to the 1990s, the efforts pertaining to media education that had been undertaken consisted largely of grass roots efforts, which were somewhat limited. Along with the grass roots efforts, there were a few innovative school projects and/or school districts that either focused on controversial media content or the skills students needed that would allow them to produce their own forms of media ("Aspen Institute Report," n.d.).

Despite these early attempts to establish media literacy and media literacy education, the “Aspen Institute Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy” served as the birth certificate of media literacy in the U.S. This report emerged in the years following the media conference that the Aspen Institute hosted (“Aspen Institute Report,” n.d.). Prior to the creation of this document, the lack of progress toward media education, especially considering its entertainment culture, in the United States, was somewhat troubling, as the report explained

It is ironic and also understandable that the United States is the premier producer of international mass media, but that media literacy education is only beginning in this country. The United States has a culture fascinated with individualism and with tote [*sic*] potential of technology to solve social problems. Its culture is also pervaded with commercialism such that as one participant argued, it simultaneously produces a “culture of denial” about the cultural implications of commercialism. Media literacy is thus an especially difficult challenge in the United States. (Aufderheide, n.d.)

In her report of the conference proceedings that emerged from National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy that was mentioned previously, Aufderheide (n.d.) explained that people of the U.S. fail to see how a commercial or capitalistic society can influence its entertainment culture. In other words, the culture of commercialism has identified and defined U.S. citizens as individuals collectively through mass media portrayals.

Seeing a need in the U.S. to move toward establishing media literacy and pedagogical approaches for educators, the Aspen Institute hosted a leadership conference

for media educators and journalists near Washington, D. C. in December 1992. The conference was an opportunity for emerging scholars and leaders in the field of media education to form relationships and share perspectives with others in the same discipline. In addition, the individuals were able to develop definitions, develop a strategic plan, coordinate future work, and examine media literacy challenges. The conference allowed participants to look at media literacy efforts in other parts of the world and to examine what steps other countries had taken with regard to establishing media literacy (“Aspen Institute Report,” n.d.). In addition to this landmark event that the Aspen Institute hosted, there was a similar meeting of media scholars at Harvard in 1993. The Media Education Institute, which was sponsored by Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education, consisted of 85 scholars and journalists who convened to discuss a number of issues, including the purpose of media, understanding media institutions, media and its relation to democracy and cultural identity, and school reform as it relates to media education (Duncan, 1993).

Popular Culture as Pedagogy

Considering the influence of the media, programs that were never intended to be used for educational purposes now possessed a pedagogical or didactic purpose as they provided perspectives about the world, behavior, and identity (Silverblatt, 1995). In particular, television programs reflected the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs that were prevalent in society (Brown, 1991; Silverblatt, 1995). Describing the influence of different forms of media to perpetuate cultural forms, Kellner and Share (2005) explained

It is highly irresponsible in the face of saturation by the Internet and media culture to ignore these forms of socialization and education; consequently, a critical

reconstruction of education should produce pedagogies that provide media literacy and enable students, teachers, and citizens to discern the nature and effects of media culture. . . . Individuals are often not aware that they are being educated and constructed by media culture, as its pedagogy is frequently invisible and media construct meanings, influence and educate audiences, and impose their messages and values. Critical media literacy involves cultivating skills in analyzing ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts. Media literacy helps people to use media intelligently, to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, and to construct alternative media. (pp. 371-372)

Students are acclimated to television, and considering that children grow up in a culture of electronic media, they often fail to perceive or comprehend the messages contained within many of the productions. In doing so, students do not evaluate the content, purpose, or audience of the intended message (Semali, 2000). Instead of analyzing the message and its related purpose, they fall victim to the media content as they adopt the values and beliefs contained within the content of the message. As so many children are vulnerable to the media due to a lack of knowledge, media education must enlighten and empower children with regard to analyzing the media. Teachers must educate children so that they can see past the surface of the message, thereby allowing them to maintain their own identity, beliefs, values, and attitudes as shaped by their daily experiences. As children receive media education, they will learn to question the content which will help them to understand and resist the purpose of the message contained within media

productions (Kellner & Share, 2005). If students are taught these skills at a young age, they will continue to question the content they see in the media. As college students, these students can assess portrayals of college students that they see in the media and see how their experiences are similar to or different from those fictional portrayals.

In addition to learning about themselves via the media, Guy (2007) contended that individuals learn about others. As individuals learn about their identity, they are able to understand their identity as well as form a basis to understand other individuals who may differ from themselves. While Guy (2007) stated that popular culture shapes or constructs one's identity, it also is used to challenge inequalities and injustices in society. Explaining how inequalities challenge accepted notions through the media, Kellner and Share (2005) explicate:

Coming to voice is important for people who have seldom been allowed to speak for themselves, but without critical analysis it is not enough. Critical analysis that explores and exposes the structure of oppression is essential because merely coming to voice is something any marginalized racist or sexist group of people can also claim. Space must be opened up and opportunities created so that people in subordinate positions have the opportunity to collectively struggle against oppression to voice their concerns and create their own representation. The process of empowerment is a major aspect of transformative education and it can take many forms, from building self-esteem to creating alternative media that voice opposition to social problems. (p. 371)

Not only do the media portray the dominant ideology and beliefs of the day, but the media can also challenge accepted notions. In challenging accepted notions, individuals,

perhaps those who have not had a voice as a result of historical contexts, must have the opportunity to construct their own media portrayals to voice their own concerns, which allows them to “struggle against oppression to voice their concerns and create their own representations” (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 371). In doing so, individuals can emphasize the social injustices that they are often faced with and show how they are overcoming these social issues. Kellner and Share (2005) pointed out that individuals who have been oppressed have the opportunity to express their concerns and values. When these individuals are able to share their experiences via the media, they become empowered because their oppression and concerns become known. Bringing attention to their oppression allows the dominant majority to see their treatment that may otherwise go unnoticed if only the concerns of the majority are portrayed in the media. In highlighting oppression, the dominant majority see their treatment of minorities and others that may otherwise go unnoticed if only the concerns of the majority are portrayed in the media.

Medium/Mode and Influence on Audience

Semali (2000) contended that messages conveyed via the media are constructed to represent reality as opposed to portraying reality as it exists. The critique of the dominant media as well as accounts that contest the mainstream media deal with what Gainer (2010) termed “the politics of representation” (p. 306). In other words, creators, writers, photographers, and directors are extremely selective when using words, images, photographs, characters, and screen shots to construct the information and convey their interpretation of an event or a scene to viewers. Their interpretation is influenced largely by their motives, which in many cases pertain to finances, such as increased advertisement or profit. The media creators’ motives, in turn, affect the audience’s

accessibility to information, thereby limiting their access to and hindering them from certain information (Semali, 2000). Considering these seemingly hidden motives, viewers who use a critical literacy approach when viewing the media are able to question the precise motives of those individuals who created the media production and/or who influenced its production. In fact, media products are targeted for a mass audience and sold for profit, so current themes and issues are embedded to provide episodes or glimpses of a social life that is fairly contemporary (Kellner, 1995). Echoing this idea of the monetary purpose behind films, Schwartz (1963) mentioned that the goal in creating movies is for those involved to earn money, and in order to ensure that a film is successful, scriptwriters often look to the ideas that appeared in earlier productions that were somewhat similar. Illustrating this idea, Schwartz (1963) described, “In portraying education, it is reasonable to assume that the film industry will often select those portrayals of education which have been successfully, or profitably, used before” (p. 7). In addition to being profitable, media is also intended to be highly pleasurable for viewers (Kellner, 1995).

Those who create and produce media employ a variety of techniques, such as sounds, sights, characterization, and setting to lure audiences into their production. Once individuals are lured into and attentive to media content, it is hoped that individuals will subscribe to and adopt certain values, perspectives, identities, and attitudes. At the same time, the media work to produce thoughts and ideas that pertain to the dominant and existent values, beliefs, attitudes, and identities to attract audiences to their media (Kellner, 1995). However, it is the audience’s decision to accept or reject the dominant ideas that are in the media, which are often representative of the dominant ideology of the

day. If an audience rejects the ideas that appear in the media, the audience members may make a conscious decision to produce their own ideas within an alternate form of media (Kellner, 1995). The process involves empowering individuals to accept or reject the dominant or pervasive identity, values, and beliefs. Tisdell (2007) pointed out that the media raise awareness about social identity based upon a number of demographics, including race, sexual orientation, class, and gender. In portraying identity based upon these demographics, media productions challenge the accepted social roles and relations to some extent while reinforcing those traditional and accepted social roles and relations. Tisdell (2007) stated that people are drawn to media portrayals because they reinforce what individuals know and believe.

Although the media portray commonly accepted identities, the ultimate goal of using a critical media literacy approach as well as the importance of stressing media education is to teach viewers to identify, understand, and analyze the underlying purpose of information that is conveyed via the media. A critical viewer is one who can analyze not only the validity of the information being presented but can also see the relevance of the information to one's life to determine the motive of the information, whether it is pleasure, entertainment, political, or financial. In addition to the relevance of the media to one's own life, a critical viewer must examine the context that shaped the production of the media. Those items that may have shaped the production of the media include the creator's race, class, gender, education, ethnicity, nationality, culture, or sexual orientation (Semali, 2000).

Brown (1991) discussed that individuals who create media are selective with regard to conveying certain perceptions to the public. These perceptions become the

widely accepted constructions of how reality exists, and in conveying this notion, they suggest to their audiences what is worthwhile, meaningful, and important. The media, especially television, construct a form of reality in that it reflects behavior that appears in society, and viewers develop ideas as to how they relate to their environment. Also, a critical viewer must question the medium that is used to convey the information including factors such as a broadcaster's or an actor's word choice, a news columnist's organization, and/or a photographer's ordering sequence, which may affect a message's content. Although the content of the media is constructed to appear a certain way or controlled to provide certain details, the ideas expressed in the content may become the perspective of the audience. The audience, as consumers of the media, may adopt this outlook, which comes with a prescribed set of attitudes, beliefs, and values that they also subscribe to as their own (Semali, 2000). As media productions raise awareness and illustrate how powerful groups define their identities as based upon their values and experiences as the "valued" or important ones in society, students are able to identify inequalities and injustices (Semali, 2000).

In doing so, people look to media productions for their own outlooks and to attain a perspective for assessing and critiquing others. Not only does television become the basis by which individuals judge others, but television also affects their leisure time, conversations, dress, appearance, finances, and outlooks (Brown, 1991; Silverblatt, 1995). Rodesiler (2010) detailed that if students are encouraged to reflect upon the medium, or what he called the mode, that is used to impart a message to a viewer, then he or she has taken the first step in examining media using a critical approach. Once a student begins critically examining the media, he or she is able to examine how the

medium affects the audience's reaction to the message, the construction of the message, and the intended receiver of the content (Rodesiler, 2010). Producers of media target specific audiences, and it is the critical viewer's task to determine how the messages that are conveyed via the media influence or affect different cultural and social groups in society (Guy, 2007; Rodesiler, 2010). Once these items can be deduced, viewers can determine what the creator's purpose was in relaying the content of the message (Rodesiler, 2010).

Stereotypes

Media portrayals and the values associated with different media representations may be accurate or inaccurate, but as with all types of media constructions, bias enters these portrayals and messages become distorted (Semali, 2000). One way in which audiences subscribe to or adopt attitudes is with the acceptance of stereotypes. Silverblatt (1995) explained that a stereotype exists when people fail to see individual differences but share the same understanding toward specific individuals or a group of individuals. As the media is generally constrained by time, duration, convention, and money, there are times when the media portrays a familiar character that viewers recognize because he or she has been portrayed before; in effect, he or she is portrayed via a stereotype.

At times, these portrayals are not intentional but are a result of a focus on a one or two characteristics of a character. A character appears stereotyped because these characteristics are repeatedly emphasized as that type of character is portrayed. The media's purpose in using stereotypes is two-fold: to maintain the attention of the audience and to shape the audience's interpretations and beliefs. When individuals see a certain characteristic associated with a stereotype, the audience learns to associate that

characteristic as stereotypical of a specific type of person. Audience members make a judgment and use the standards they see on television and in print to evaluate and analyze situations in their own lives (Brown, 1991). In other words, the audience members have become acclimated to the ideas contained within the media, and now they identify with these values and ideas and accept them as their own.

Considering television's ability to create and convey stereotypes, the media possess the power to normalize stereotypes and misinformation pertaining to a wide variety of issues (Radeloff & Bergman, 2009). Guy (2007) wrote that as popular culture is pedagogical about demographics, it also teaches other forms of social differences and makes them seem ordinary. Brown (1991) contended that television is a force that has the ability to dehumanize or free individuals. Continuing to describe television as a powerful force, he detailed

The medium can contribute to a sense of alienation and meaninglessness in life, to estrangement from one's own existence; or it can be an instrument for cultural diversity (instead of standardization and uniformity) by contributing to a person's full potential with options of choice. Media can support socialization to the status quo of society or to creative change towards enriching growth in that society.

(Brown, 1991, p. 3)

Media productions portray a number of issues from the manner in which things operate to the value associated with a particular object to the benefits related to a specific activity. These media portrayals reach the mass public and shape the opinions of many as far as what is desirable. As a result, society's attitudes and values center upon media productions. To be educated in today's society, one must think critically about the

information imparted via the media and how the medium influences the information (Brown, 1991).

Not only does the medium used to convey the information have an effect on the way the information is received, but there is not one universal way to receive and process a message. Individuals are unique in that individuals have had different experiences, and the experiences that an individual has had in his or her lifetime are the basis for determining an interpretation. These interpretations may be influenced by previous knowledge or experience pertaining to an event or topic in the news. Those who are knowledgeable about a topic that they later see in a news story are more likely to interpret that information correctly, as they had previous exposure to and knowledge of the topic (Semali, 2000). Thus, this illustrates the importance of teaching media literacy to individuals because if they are knowledgeable that media portrayals may not present characters realistically, they will realize that characters are being stereotyped. Individuals may also realize that some characters may be portrayed differently as a result of their race, age, gender, ethnicity, and/or religion.

Not only does the medium affect the content, but an audience member's emotions also determine his or her reaction to a form of media. Silverblatt (1995) expressed the idea that media productions, specifically those that take an audio or aural form, elicit more of an emotional response in viewers and listeners as it is more natural for individuals to accept the content of these media as opposed to evaluating one's reaction and analyzing why one reacted a specific way to what he or she saw or heard. In addition to one's response, another consideration that influences the manner in which content is received is that individuals have different viewing habits. Individuals decide what

aspects of a media production to pay attention to. Television is usually viewed while individuals are completing other activities, or the television may be turned on simply for the sake of noise. As a result, individuals may tune in and out to the media production and hear bits and pieces of the program. Likewise, there are times when individuals just want to watch television for the purposes of relaxation. Silverblatt (1995) called this form of viewing a type of “electronic meditation” as viewers are not analyzing the content or looking for specific symbols; instead, they are mindlessly watching television for the value of entertainment or an alternative to reality (p. 5). The information that a person hears may shape his or her beliefs or attitudes or even define what an audience sees as valuable or desirable (Guy, 2007). When individuals are not participating, listening, or watching actively, they may receive content that the media creator did not intend.

Alternative to Censorship

Heins and Cho (2003) argued that media literacy is more than a defense against controversial content in the media and that that media literacy education is an alternative to censorship that threatens citizens’ First Amendment rights. Per the First Amendment, citizens have the right to watch the media, which involves accessing and analyzing information contained within the media. Heins and Cho (2003) contended that “children and adolescents cannot grow into the thoughtful education citizens who are essential to a functional democracy” (p. 2) without these basic rights. Heins and Cho (2003) noted that there have been a number of attempts to censor the media in the history of the United States to the effect that censorship has become a mainstay in the political realm, and with emerging technology, these attempts to censor intensify.

Media Consumption

Calls for censorship intensified as television production increased. Even today as Americans watch more television than they ever have in the past, one could say that television watching for many Americans is a hobby. The need for media literacy is exacerbated considering television watching and media consumption is at an all-time high. According to Gfk Mediamark Research & Intelligence, LLC (2013), Americans view approximately 13 billion 30-minute segments of television programming on a weekly basis. Researchers suggested that these media statistics remain true, even as new technologies have emerged (Gfk Mediamark Research & Intelligence, 2013). Neilson (2013) illustrates that Americans' consumption of the media continues to increase as individuals spend additional time viewing media content via innovative ways, using mobile devices and media streaming. Neilson (2013) found that the typical American watches an estimated 41 hours a week of electronic media. With regard to African-Americans, this number increases to 55 hours a week, although Hispanics and Asians view less television. Hispanics view over 35 hours a week of electronic media while Asians spend approximately 27 hours viewing the media.

With the emergence of new forms of media, adults watch more media than they have in the past (Neilson, 2012). Adults age 18-24 spend over 106 hours per month watching television, and this number increases with age. Adults age 25-34 watch over 126 hours per month, while those age 35-49 watch over 145 hours of television per month. In addition to watching television, adults age 18-24 spend over 35 hours a month using the Internet on a computer and 13 hours watching videos on the Internet. In comparison, individuals age 25-34 spend 35 hours using the Internet and nearly 10 hours

watching videos on the Internet. To examine these statistics by age and gender: Males age 18-49 watch over 124 hours of television and spend over 10 hours watching movies on the Internet. In comparison, females age 18-49 spend over 137 hours watching television while they spend over eight hours watching movies on the Internet (Neilson, 2012). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) found that those age 15-19 average nearly two hours watching television each weekday while they spend nearly three hours per weekend day. Those age 20-24 average 2.12 hours of television per week day and 2.9 hours of television per weekend day. Those age 25 to 34 average 2.1 hours of television per week day and 2.8 per weekend day. Individuals age 35-44 watch nearly 2 hours of television per week day and 3.1 hours of television per weekend day. Those age 45-54 spend 2.4 hours watching television per weekday, while they spend 3.43 hours per weekend day. Those age 55-64 watch 2.9 hours of television per week day and 4.1 hours of television per weekend day. Individuals age 65-74 average 4 hours of television per week day and 4.3 hours of television per weekend day. Those age 75 and older average 4.3 hours of television per weekday and the same amount of time per weekend day (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

These viewing habits are made possible in part by 1,782 television stations, as of 2009, in the U. S., and over 65.8 million households that subscribe to cable, which decreased from 66.1 million in 2000 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010a). This decrease in cable subscribers is likely due to the new technologies that became available, both media streaming and mobile devices (Neilson, 2013). Over 80 million households subscribed to broadband in 2009, while 52.5 million households subscribed to mobile broadband, which increased by 27 million households in 2009 from the previous year. Although

these statistics show that new technology is becoming mainstream, the survey reported that older technology is still present in households as 99% of all households own a radio (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

With regard to television viewership, 89.6% of those aged 18-24 and 25-34 reported watching television the previous week, while 92.4% of 35-44 year-olds reported watching television the previous week. These percentages continue to increase as the age of the research participants increases, as 97% those 65 and older reported they had watched television in the last week. A larger percentage of high school graduates (94.2%) reported watching television than those who did not graduate high school (92.9%), those who attended college (93%), and those who graduated college (91.3%). With regard to cable viewing, 85.5% of those who attended college reported watching cable in the past seven days in comparison with 72.9% of individuals who did not graduate high school, 83.6% of high school graduates, and 84.1% of those who graduated college. A greater percentage of those aged 18-24 accessed the Internet in the previous week as compared with 88.4% of 25-34 years old, 85.2% of 35-44 years old, 80% of 45-54 years old, 76.1% of those aged 55-64, and 43.1% of those aged 65 and older. With regard to education, 95.4% of college graduates accessed the Internet in the last week prior to completing the questionnaire in comparison to 42.4% of those who did not graduate high school, 67.4% of those who graduated high school, and 88.3% of those who attended college (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

Just as a greater percentage of younger and middle-aged adults accounted for larger percentages of those who accessed the Internet in the previous week, 85.7% of individuals aged 18-24 listened to the radio in the previous week while 86.4% of those

aged 25-34 years old, 86.8% of 35-44, 86.5% of 45-54, 82.3% of 55-64, and 64.6% of those aged 65 and older. With regard to education, 85% of college graduates reported listening to the radio in the previous week, while 74% of those who did not graduate high school, 80.3% of those who graduated high school, and 85.5% of those who attended college (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

Persuasion and the Media

Producers of the media attempt to sell ideas to their audiences so that audience members will believe these messages as their own, or they attempt to encourage their audiences to take a desired action (Media Literacy Project, n.d.). There are a variety of methods that creators and producers of media employ to help their audiences internalize media messages or influence behavior. Shrum and Lee (2012) discussed that cultivation theory is foundational to explaining the persuasiveness of television. They wrote that cultivation theory encompasses two aspects: The first is that television portrayals often construct what comes to be accepted as reality; instead, the reality that television presents is “a systematic distortion of reality” (p. 148). The second aspect of cultivation theory, as Shrum and Lee (2012) explained, is that as individuals become exposed to and familiar with the attitudes as they appear in the television portrayals, viewers have a tendency to adopt these attitudes as their own. Then, media portrayals are persuasive as they expose attitudes to others in a realistic fashion, and in doing so, individuals adopt these attitudes, often doing so unconsciously (Shrum & Lee, 2012). In watching media portrayals of community colleges, individuals assume the same attitudes and beliefs, thereby giving affirmation to and reinforcing the social injustices that are present in portrayals of community college students.

In addition to this model, Shrum and Lee (2012) also explained that the accessibility model for first-order cultivation effects is essential in explaining the persuasiveness of the media. Shrum and Lee (2012) stated that this model explains the heuristic decisions, defined as decisions that individuals make when they do not take all of the facts and information into consideration, that individuals make. The authors discussed that the media portray certain constructs (violence, illness, etc.), and as they do, these constructs become more frequent and accessible to viewers. The media position these constructs in the forefront of the viewers' minds. In turn, viewers base their decisions on this information that the media portray as it is prevalent in the media and subsequently in their minds. As this model accounts for individuals' heuristic decisions, it is also closely related to the model that Shrum and Lee (2012) detailed. The information, whether factual or fictional, conveyed through the media persuades the attitudes of the audience.

Although these are just two strategies that the media use to persuade the audience of entertainment media, there are other strategies as well. Carpenter and Green (2012) cited that television sitcoms are nothing more than stories, and they stated that before television, storytelling was the mainstream form of entertainment. Carpenter and Green (2012) explained that once more innovative methods were introduced, individuals were able to record their stories and share their stories to a mass audience, which today is a huge industry in the U.S. and a significant part of today's culture. These authors indicated that narratives have the ability to transport readers, and in doing so, the audience, including readers of books as well as viewers of television and electronic media, embark on an emotional and imaginative journey. As part of their journey, they experience the

same emotions as do the characters or identify with the stylistic devices or elements of a story. As readers are transported and identify with the emotions and experiences of the characters, their own personal beliefs, values, and attitudes may be altered as they may identify with the main character, thereby adopting a certain character's attitude toward and outlook on life.

To illustrate the media's persuasion and their ability to transport readers, the researcher will use an interview clip (Archive of American Television, 2012) in which Chuck Lorre, the co-creator and executive producer of *The Big Bang Theory*, explained how the idea for the sitcom came to fruition. Describing the origins of the television show in an interview (Archive of American Television, 2012), Lorre said he was having a conversation about an idea for a new project with Bill Prady, the other co-creator of the sitcom. As part of the discussion, Prady shared his experiences of working with computer programmers who were very intelligent but were unable to function in their daily lives. These programmers became the inspiration for the scientists in *The Big Bang Theory*, and Lorre and Prady decided to introduce a young female who was becoming an adult and living independently of her parents for the first time. The two co-creators decided to merge these two ideas, and Lorre stated that it is through the character of Penny that the average viewer is able to relate to the show. As the viewer identifies with her, the audience is transported to Penny's world and meets the four scientists through her character. Therefore, it is very possible that Penny's attitude toward the four scientists becomes the viewer's attitudes, which indicates how the media possess the power to persuade and even manipulate the audience's emotions and values (Archive of American Television, 2012).

Higher Education in Fiction

First Account of College Life

Bagg (1871) was the first individual to write an account of collegiate life in the United States. Thelin (2004) described Bagg as a “pack rat” (p. 93) who kept mementos from his time at Yale, and these items assisted him as he wrote a 713-page book detailing his college experience at Yale. Albeit nonfiction, Bagg’s (1871) *Four Years at Yale* created an idyllic expression of what constituted American college and university culture to the public. Describing his purpose in composing his account, he detailed

The erroneous and absurd idea which very many intelligent people, who have not chanced to experience it, entertain upon the subject of college life, have led me to believe that a minute account of affairs as they exist to-day at one of the chief American colleges would not be without value to the general public, nor without interest to the alumni and undergraduates of other colleges as well as the one described. (Bagg, 1871, p. iii)

This account has contributed to the perception of what college and universities are supposed to be like with regard to college life, student activities, university traditions, honor societies, and student behavior. In doing so, it created a consciousness of what institutions of higher learning are like, especially in a society in which few attended. Thelin (2004) mentioned that Bagg’s book with its descriptive accounts of campus life became the precedent that many colleges and universities across the nation attempted to institute. Bagg’s (1871) account of college life became the college experience engrained in the psyche of Americans, and now his idealized account is a comparative basis for

today's fictional accounts nearly a century and a half later. Illustrating one of his many experiences at Yale, he wrote

In November 1824, the faculty decreed as follows in regard to uniform dress among the students: "The coat to be a plain frock-boat, with a standing cape. The classes to be distinguished by marks of braid on the cape of the coat, the Freshmen wearing one, the Sophomores two, Juniors three, and Seniors four. The color of the broadcloth or cassimere coat and pantaloons to be blue; the vest either black or white. The cravats to be black or white. New garments made after the present date to conform to the above description." (Bagg, 1871, pp. 519-520)

Although Bagg (1871) noted that this dress code did not last more than six months after it was implemented, the description of the dress code provided readers with a glimpse into the dress of Yale students during the late nineteenth century, thus allowing readers to note the formality and sophistication of dress. Also, the passage allowed readers to see the customs associated with each class, as students were required to wear braids that identified their class rank. Once the students had attained the rank of senior and completed their courses of study, they were required to attend Presentation Day, which was the culmination of their college studies and hard work at Yale. After the planned activities on this day, the seniors "would stretch themselves on the grass in front of South Middle, and while away their last afternoon together" (Bagg, 1871, p. 488).

Not only does Bagg (1871) describe the dress and customs of the day, but he also provided a detailed account of the buildings. In describing Yale University's need for a large building on campus, Bagg (1871) indicated that President Woolsey developed plans and arranged for a two-story building to be built, but soon, this two-story building

developed into a massive three-story building, measuring “100 by 52 feet, and two towers, 75 feet high, standing beside its principal entrance” (Bagg, 1871, pp. 23-24). Also, he described the building’s “winding staircases” that led to the floors located above the main one (Bagg, 1871, p. 24). Fictional accounts today are seen in contrast to Bagg’s (1871) detailed account of Yale, which only the elite experienced. As more and more began attending college during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the experience became less idealized. His nonfiction account became transformed into fictional accounts of what college should be like or what individuals want college to be like. Bagg’s (1871) account would eventually evolve into content for fiction writers to craft novels, and Hinton (1994) asserted that many college novels have provided content for the big screen. Just as fictional accounts cannot measure up to the idealized experience that Bagg (1871) detailed, movies and television shows present college where the focus is far from idealized, but representations of reality are constructed that focus on the extracurricular, as opposed to the academic, and on the football stadium, as opposed to the architectural façade. To some extent, this focus on elements other than the academic, has become the expectation of fictional accounts, namely in movies and novels, or on television, that focus on four-year institutions while two-year institutions are often portrayed with an emphasis on non-traditional students, inadequate education, and mediocre students (Barasch, 1983; Bourke, 2013; Boys, 1946; Hinton 1994; Schuth, 1972; Thelin & Townsend, 1988; Tucciarone, 2007; Umphlett, 1984).

Fictional Portrayals of Colleges and Universities

Since Bagg’s work was published, a number of studies have examined the topic of higher education and its representation in fiction, either in short fiction, novels,

television shows, or movies (Barasch, 1983; Boys, 1946; Thelin & Townsend, 1988; Tierney, 2004). Mellard (1989) wrote that novels focusing on the university or college are often referred to as academic or college novels that are concerned primarily with the college or university and its faculty. In addition to these components, the academic or college novel focuses on the events that occur in relation to the academic calendar. Siegel (1989) and Rossen (1993) claimed that there is not another institution apart from the university that is often met with disparaging comments and harsh criticism. Detailing the manner in which higher education is often portrayed in fiction, Rossen (1993) described

The way in which academic life is portrayed in fiction creates a complex intersection among a number of forces. A primary issue which these novels engage is the interplay between fiction and fact: We assume University novels to be realistic because they are based on an actual institution, often enough on a real University in a real place. As such, they are important because they are widely believed by their readers to constitute an accurate representation of academic life, whether they do so or not; and what remains true is that these novels are heavily influenced by the subject itself, which exerts a strong pull on the novel form. (p.

1)

Readers often assume that the portrayal of events that are contained within an academic or college novel is truthful because of the realistic settings; therefore, readers believe what they learn in these novels to be true. Thus, the representation of these colleges and universities, regardless of how realistic, fictional, or factual, becomes the understanding of those who read academic novels. As the setting is often based upon a real institution,

individuals have a tendency to forget that they are reading fiction, and the fictional account becomes a factual representation or an accurate portrayal of higher education.

Agreeing with Rossen (1993), Carter (1990) posited that fiction is composed of more than words or descriptions on a page. He maintained that the words become real accounts that readers believe and admire, so those fictional accounts composed of descriptive words and language become the truth for their readers. Expounding upon this idea, Carter (1990) explained

And if novels constitute rather than reflect the world, then fiction can have no real effects. A literary place can develop spurious facticity, can come to appear just as real as a 'real' place. Their reality warranted, literary accounts then can influence policy discussions. (p. 10)

These fictional accounts add credence to the manner in which individuals perceive these institutions—the fiction becomes factual accounts and representations so much so that they can inform and influence discussions of new and existent policy, as Carter (1990) maintained. Likewise, hooks (2009) suggested that movies become “the reimagined, reinvented version of the real” (p. 1). Rossen (1993) noted that novelists are not concerned with accuracy in sampling, so they write novels that appeal to an idealized and imaginative notion of education, which is the notion that many individuals possess. Rossen (1993) claimed that the twentieth-century women writers use females who easily adapt to the institution, but these characters possess an array of personality characteristics, spanning from confident academic to flirtatious women. Rossen (1993) contended that this observation is in contrast to fictional accounts about males who possess an idealized view of higher education. For example, Mellard (1989) observed

that Seymour Levin, the protagonist in Bernard Malamud's *A New Life*, is hired to teach English at Cascadia College. He initially comes to the institution with an exceedingly idealistic notion concerning higher education, believing that it should emphasize the liberal arts and humanities. As such, he has a difficult time accepting a more practical view of education as well as the purpose of his department, which is to teach students written communication skills, including composition and grammar.

Although males and females are portrayed differently, students, as portrayed in fiction, seem to share a sense of community. Often, this emerges through students partaking in extracurricular activities, which take precedence over academics in many works of fiction. In fact, Thelin and Townsend (1988) explicated that the only time that academics are mentioned in many of these portrayals is in regard to a test or exam. At times, academics may also be alluded to when a student refers to an inspirational professor. Boys (1946) suggested that the depiction of institutions is not realistic and instead offers a distorted view of college life. He noted that many novels have "failed to capture the spirit of the American campus" (p. 381). In addition to this failure, he remarked that novels are not realistic in their depiction of faculty as they lead mundane lives, but he suggested that these faculty members are generally loveable characters. However, Boys (1946) also indicated that faculty, at times, are portrayed as eccentric or absent-minded professors. Barasch (1983) also commented that American novels generally present college professors as burned-out, mentally ill, or deranged. However, in his examination of academic novels published in the last 25 years, Tierney (2004) found a fairly realistic depiction of academic issues as they exist in higher education

today. He found that academic freedom has been replaced by the pursuit of tenure as a central concern, and he contended that this is representative of today's university.

Higher Education in Movies and Television

In addition to these academic or college novels, a number of motion pictures and television shows that feature colleges and universities have been produced. Although the forms are different, both media have gone largely unnoticed by members of the professoriate. Hinton (1994) wrote that "even the greatest distortions are presented to the American public without a whimper of dissent from the campus" (p. 7). Continuing to express this irony, he expounded, "It is so strange that a profession so intent on studying the rest of society pays so little attention to how society looks at it" (Hinton, 1994, p. 7).

Despite the lack of scholarly or critical attention that media portrayals have received, Hinton (1994) noted that motion pictures, beginning in the 1960s, explore only two reasons characters attend college. The first reason is related to the value of education. The student attending college is not always the one who values education but is urged to attend college as his/her parent realizes the importance of possessing a college education. Although parents were usually the ones who saw the merit of higher education, students were often unsure or hesitant as to the value of a college education. Schuth (1972) suggested that much of college life as reflected in the movies is irrelevant because many life experiences require an individual to use skills that he or she did not learn in college. Hinton (1994) claimed the valued college experience for students was attending college away from home. It was commonly portrayed in movies that those students who did so achieved success in their lives and expanded their horizons while those students who attended community college lacked upward mobility and career

opportunities. Hinton (1994) asserted that Wendy in *American Graffiti*, a 1973 movie, responds to Kurt that she does not have intentions of going anywhere when, in fact, she plans to attend the local community college once she graduates high school. Hinton (1994) stated that the message concerning two-year institutions is clear in the movie, which is that these colleges lead to “dead-end lives” (p. 42) and do not allow for social advancement, personal growth, and career opportunities. Because Wendy decides to attend a two-year institution, she is marginalized as one who will not amount to much during her lifetime. She is presented with a degree of social injustice as she is apathetic in her response to attend a community college. Audiences accept this message as it is presented in convincing fashion; it is implied that she will end up in a “dead-end” job and lead a rather mundane life, as did the town’s greaser (Hinton, 1994, p. 42). However, if viewers were to analyze the movie using critical media literacy skills, they would realize that as a result of her community college education, she will have sufficient opportunities in life, despite the fact that she did not attend a four-year institution immediately following high school.

The second reason that many movie characters attend college concerns the opportunities and successes that usually accompany a college degree (Hinton, 1994). Also, Hinton (1994) argued that in the mid-1960s, another reason to attend college becomes apparent through media portrayals. Using an example from *The Young Lovers*, a 1964 film, Hinton (1994) maintained that the character Tarrago explains that he attends college to escape the real world, which he sees as cruel, as opposed to his favorable view of college. Again, audience members, as they apply a critical media framework, would realize that college is not an escape from the real world. Rather, college should involve

preparing an individual for a career, but in these portrayals, college is constructed to appear like an escape, though these are constructions of reality and not reality itself (Brown, 1991; Semali, 2000).

Beginning with silent films in the 1920s and then musical cinema in the 1930s, colleges and universities provided movie scriptwriters with content, plots, and settings from the start of America's love affair with institutions of higher education. Hinton (1994) pointed out that *College* and *The Freshman*, both silent films produced in 1927, centered their plots on college life. Umphlett (1984) contended that this was due to the public's thirst for "a supposedly high-living, glamorized life-style" (p. 16). This idealized notion of what college life should be influenced the silent films of the 1920s. Umphlett (1984) indicated that many of these films focused on football, even when many of these films involved women and romance. As more and more movies focused on extracurricular and social activities for college students, the movies inevitably would portray romantic interests between coed students. Umphlett (1984) believed that the social side of college allowed for "a more liberal attitude toward sexual behavior and social expectations" (p. 34). However, it is not until the 1960s and 1970s when college movies openly allowed for "uninhibited sexual license and expression" (Umphlett, 1984, p. 33).

Continuing in the 1930s, the focus in college movies would remain on football games and college life (Bourke, 2013; Umphlett, 1984). However, Umphlett (1984) explained that the form of films in the 1930s is different from silent movies: the silent form evolved into the "all-singing, all-dancing, and all-talking musical of the 1930s" (p. 44). Umphlett (1984) suggested that an audience watching a musical about college

would believe that college life solely involved singing and dancing, as showcased in *Collegiate*, as well as the other aspects that centered on social life. Umphlett (1984) posited that musical comedies did not address the academic side or exchange of knowledge because Hollywood strived to create films that appealed to the “escapist mood” and “fantasy obsession” of the viewing public (p. 46). Describing this idea, Umphlett (1984) explained, “Hollywood, of course, was presenting what it thought moviegoers wanted to see” (p. 74).

Umphlett (1984) maintained that a number of silent films produced during the 1920s illustrated college as a socialization process. Likewise, Hinton (1994) detailed that many musicals also used colleges and universities and that these portrayals would influence countless numbers of Americans during the 1930s and 1940s. Umphlett (1984) wrote that of all the themes that emerged from productions of college movies during the 1920s and 1930s, the most pervasive was that higher education served just a select few—the elite. Even though the elite were primarily the ones who attended colleges and universities in their early days, Umphlett (1984) commented that a democratization of higher education occurred in the 1940s and 1950s. The G. I. Bill acted as a catalyst that expanded access, and with these federal benefits for veterans, the idealized college experience of the 1920s and 1930s shifted toward realism, thus reflecting events of the day (Umphlett, 1984).

Also, during the 1930s, a shift toward realism can be seen in a subgenre of college movies, which portrayed service academies (Umphlett, 1984). These service academies included the Naval Academy and other military academies. Umphlett (1984) suggested that these films were closely related to college films. These films took a variety of forms,

including musicals, and contained plots involving rank, romance, conflicts, discipline, and football. While these movies about college life and service academies contained similar topics, the most notable differences were the uniformed actors and administrative hierarchy that were apparent in films featuring military academies (Umphlett, 1984).

Toward the 1940s and 1950s, movies continued to center around football.

Umphlett (1984) illustrated that the coach was portrayed in heroic proportions as one who touched the lives of his athletes and made them into charismatic men. Umphlett (1984) explained that there were biopics that featured legendary athletes and coaches who achieved success and fame in their athletic careers. However, in the early 1950s, media portrayals become somewhat critical of college football as it had evolved into a commercial endeavor that merely consisted of transactions to purchase players. As a result of these portrayals, plots concerning football were neither the most popular nor the most original storylines in college movies, although college football movies could still be found until they nearly disappeared in the 1960s (Umphlett, 1984).

Even though college football movies lost their appeal, college musicals remained popular in the 1940s, and this continued throughout the 1960s. It was not until the television became a commonplace item in people's homes and writers and producers of television shows would create more interesting plots that musicals became outmoded. Before they were replaced by television, 1960's musicals were directed toward a young demographic, specifically to those attending high school and college, and they incorporated the interests and values of this demographic. Like the musicals of the 1930s, the focus remained on the social activities of college life in which academics were generally nonexistent (Umphlett, 1984). Considering the popularity of these musicals,

Umphlett (1984) questioned how many students enrolled in college as a result of the social activities conveyed in these musicals, and at the same time, he wondered how many college students ended up heartbroken and disappointed upon realizing that college was not as it was portrayed on the big screen.

Prior to the mid-1960s, students were generally presented with other students in groups. In the late 1960s, Bourke (2013) maintained that a new theme emerged in college movies as characters often found themselves in conflict with themselves and others, namely professors and students. Students learned how to interact with one another, but eventually, this portrayal of students gave way to empty gathering places on the college campuses of the mid-1960s. In the 1970s, the focus would shift again, from that of alienation to rebellion against political events and relevance of college coursework (Hinton, 1994). As the U.S. became involved in Vietnam, “long-haired, pot-smoking, and generally unkempt students” began voicing their opposition in a rebellious manner (Umphlett, 1984, p. 151). Umphlett (1984) asserted that students’ attitudes toward Vietnam were captured in a number of movies produced during this period. Generally, these movies presented administrators who were in disbelief due to the events that ensued as a result of the country’s political involvement (Umphlett, 1984).

Although this period was tumultuous on campuses across the nation, the outcome was that students received representation in the university, which reduced the power of college and university administrations (Umphlett, 1984). Illustrating the state of campuses in 1970s after the rebellion ended, Hinton (1994) pointed out

Wide-scale student radicalism ended before the Vietnam war's conclusion, and the 1970s became a quiet time on the nation's campuses. The old historic ties that bind were dead, but so was the community spirit of campus protest. (p. 81)

Instead of protest and rebellion, students in the 1970s became absorbed in themselves, but Hinton (1994) noted this theme was not apparent from media portrayals of movies produced in the 1970s. Hinton (1994) stated that instead of expressing their own self-absorption, these students identified more with previous generations, so Hinton (1994) expressed that "Nostalgia, not narcissism, distinguishes 1970s movies about higher education" (p. 83). Hinton (1994) contended that a number of productions in the 1970s were set in earlier times. For example, he wrote that *The Way We Were* was set in the 1930s while *Carnal Knowledge* and *Class of '44* both looked to the 1940s for their setting. This was due in part to the 1970 campus shootings at Kent State and Jackson State, and filmmakers relied on earlier times, as "Nostalgia seemed a like a safer bet" (Hinton, 1994, p. 83).

Setting movies in previous times suggests that movies do not always reflect reality or even contain original plots. Boys (1946) indicated that Hollywood has lacked originality in its portrayal of colleges. When colleges appear in television shows and motion pictures, colleges are almost always presented to evoke a laugh from the audience. Hinton (1994) pointed out that there are a number of negative portrayals, such as *National Lampoon's Animal House*, that show an unfavorable view of college as one fraternity rages war against another, even to the extent that this movie and others like it "vulgarize" college (p. 159). Hinton (1994) maintained that as the characters in *National Lampoon's Animal House* graduate college and achieve success, the film implies that

college is unrelated and irrelevant to any sort of success that occurs in one's lifetime, which offers a demeaning and condescending view of college. Summarizing the negative portrayals of college, Hinton (1994) and Schuth (1972) illustrated that the academic side of college is rarely showcased in films, and as a result, academics are not taken seriously. Instead of focusing on academics, movies tend to focus on extracurricular activities, including sports, and are often set in places other than classrooms or libraries (Bourke, 2013; Hinton, 1994; Schuth, 1972). As academics are not taken seriously, professors are depicted as theoretical and unfamiliar with the practical world, a representation that Umphlett (1984) suggested makes them an easy target to criticize in early media portrayals, especially considering that Americans valued the practical. Umphlett (1984) wrote that *The Male Animal*, a 1942 film, "did the most for improving public sympathy for the college professor" (p. 114). Also, in the 1940s, movies presented professors in plots in which they faced social realities. Umphlett (1984) cited that in *The Accused*, a 1949 movie, a female professor was charged with murdering a college student who is intent on raping her, although the professor claims she acted in self-defense.

Over time and during the evolution of movies throughout the decades, the portrayal of the college professor changes from a rather eccentric individual to more of a romantic individual. Umphlett (1984) detailed that in doing so, professors appeared more humanized, and as a result, these portrayals conveyed the notion that professors were capable of interacting and willing to work with students. Professors were not always presented as being personable; at times, they were introduced as dark, depressed, and even suicidal individuals. This trend continued through the 1970s (Umphlett, 1984). At the same time, some professors were presented as respectable figures, especially during

the 1970s when there was overwhelming interest in scientific research and space exploration (Umphlett, 1984), although Bourke (2013) claimed that the need for scientific research was expressed in movies as early as the 1950s. While faculty have been present in media portrayals since early decades, administrators, who often are absent from motion pictures, are frequently portrayed as unethical because their motives and actions are the result of soliciting donations (Hess, 2012; Hinton, 1994; Osborn, 1990).

Another way in which movies showcasing college do not depict reality is through their portrayal of changing demographics and increasing diversity. Osborn (1990) asserted that non-traditional students were the exception in movies of the 1930s and 1940s, but they became a mainstay in education once veterans began using their G. I. Bill to pay for college. Osborn (1990) wrote that these students appear in movies produced in the late 1940s but noted that the problem with these portrayals is that they did not reflect the actuality of the situation. The movies had a tendency to portray these veterans as full-time students, but many were earning their college education on a part-time basis. Osborn (1990) and Hinton (1994) explained that many adult students enrolled in college in the 1980s, but there are few movies during this time period that reflect the adult student attending college, as much of the focus is on the traditional student. Also, Bourke (2013) posited that one element that is missing from college films produced in the 1970s was diversity as most college students portrayed were White male students who hailed from middle-class backgrounds. However, he affirmed that this changes as diversity becomes a part of college movies in the 1980s.

As non-traditional students enrolled in colleges in the 1940s, it became clear from movies that colleges were not equipped to serve these students, as Osborn (1990)

maintained that there were not any support services or programs in place as late as the 1980s to help these students succeed. He thought that considering the lack of services present for non-traditional students, “it takes an exceptional adult to succeed in college” (Osborn, 1990, p. 212). Noting the manner in which non-traditional students are portrayed, Osborn (1990) explicated that there are more negative portrayals than positive portrayals regarding these students. Osborn (1990) stated that a college registers non-traditional students and “expects them to fit the traditional student mold” (p. 181). While Hinton (1994) agreed with Osborn’s assessment of non-traditional students, Osborn (1990) expounded that there were a few movies in which an administrator would express welcome or praise to these older students. He discussed that a number of changes have occurred since adult students were first introduced on screen as these students have been portrayed more recently in somewhat risqué scenes with regard to relationships and dating. As time has passed, other factions on campus have accepted these non-traditional students, as they are no longer seen as outsiders (Osborn, 1990). In the movies of the early to mid-1940s, Osborn (1990) contended that there were actually groups on campus, primarily faculty members and administrators, who actively sought the removal of non-traditional students from campus. In fact, Osborn (1990) indicated that “female administrators, if they have any power at all, are the enemies of adult college students” (p. 196). Although these media portrayals are often set at four-year institutions, these portrayals have a tendency to ostracize non-traditional students as they are different from traditional students. Osborn (1990) wrote that institutions were not prepared to handle the influx of these students as they did not have programs in place to meet the needs of these adult learners.

Hinton (1994) thought that many individuals first learned about college from watching movies. However, he posited that movies produced in the 1980s were not accurate with regard to changing demographics. Only three movies, *Back to School*, *Educating Rita*, and *High Time*, produced during this period incorporate a non-traditional student. Although older with regard to age, the non-traditional student is seen as one among the traditional students (Hinton, 1994). Also, in the late 1970s and 1980s, the issue of access was front and center in the movies. One film that took up this issue was *Breaking Away*, a 1979 film in which a child of a laborer enrolls in college (Hinton, 1994). This action represents a departure from the norm at a time when only the elite attended college. Hinton (1994) suggested that as more individuals enrolled, there was a democratization of higher education as access was expanded. No longer was college simply for the elite in society as it was in earlier decades, so the idealized notion of attending college became a more practical endeavor for college students as they prepared for a career in the 1980s (Hinton, 1994; Umphlett, 1984). Umphlett (1984) mentioned that this notion appeared as early as 1942 with *Harvard, Here I Come* and would continue in the 1950s with *Hold That Line*.

In addition to the democratization of college in the 1980s, Hinton (1994) maintained that some of the movies of this decade illustrate parents' changing values. Parents' values shifted as they were less willing to sacrifice for their children than they were in the 1960s when they valued education (Hinton, 1994). As a result, students pressured themselves to gain admission into colleges. Hinton (1994) indicated that Joel and his friend in the 1983 *Risky Business* "crave admission" (p. 88) at Ivy-League

institutions, and subsequently, a sense of competition emerged among students to earn admission into these institutions.

Along with this competition among students in the 1980s, a new genre was introduced during this decade. Hinton (1994) expressed that this new genre consisted of nerd films, and the first one to be produced was *Revenge of the Nerds*, which was followed by *Fraternity Vacation* a year later in 1985. Three years later in 1988, *Revenge of the Nerds II: Nerds in Paradise* was produced. Illustrating the implications of these films, Hinton detailed, “With the 1980s nerd films, however, acceptance of diversity no longer required integration. The nerds were free to organize their own fraternity and exist outside the mainstream. The outsiders prevail and maintain their own identities” (p. 93). A decade later, in the 1990s and continuing in the 2000s, Bourke (2013) described that movies produced during these decades “were a mix of poignant social criticisms, depictions of intercollegiate athletics, and good time U” (p. 463). Clearly, he indicated that the issues plaguing institutions of higher education today resonate with those of previous decades.

Community College in Fiction

Although researchers have examined the portrayals of higher education in fiction, there is a need to focus on the works that portray community colleges. In fact, Bourke et al. (2009) asserted that although the community college has been the subject of many works of fiction, scholarship analyzing these portrayals is limited. Hinton (1994), in his analysis of movies that focus on colleges and universities, indicated that not one movie produced during the 30-year period between 1960 and 1990 presents non-traditional students at a community college, which is where a large percentage of non-traditional

students choose to begin their collegiate studies. The failure of the media to accurately portray community colleges and their non-traditional population results in skewed depictions of community colleges for the American public. Hinton (1994) avowed that these individuals obtain their information about colleges from watching the media, so these portrayals have a negative influence. Therefore, it becomes essential to examine students' attitudes toward community colleges to see if students are influenced by these portrayals that often contain social injustice. Analyzing this issue provides researchers with insights as to the reputation that community colleges possess and if these portrayals influence students' decisions to enroll at two-year institutions.

Others, such as Bourke et al. (2009), have examined the portrayal of community colleges in works of fiction, namely short fiction, novels, television shows, and movies. With regard to television shows, they examined *Roseanne*, *Growing Pains*, *Who's the Boss*, and *Trailer Park Boys*. With regard to movies, they examined *Rudy*, *Hoop Dreams* (a documentary), and *Nobody's Child*. Using a content analysis, these researchers examined episodes in which a character was enrolled in a community college. The researchers concluded that the characters attend college for a variety of reasons including immediate financial stability, career opportunities, skill development, or transferable coursework. The reasons that individuals enroll in community college is to improve their position in society as they see college education as a means to an end, which encompasses financial, academic, and social aspects (Shiffman, 2014). Many community college students come from low socioeconomic levels, as 58% of community college students receive some form of financial aid. Thirty-eight percent of community college students receive federal grants, while 19% receive federal loans, 12% receive state aid,

and 13% receive institutional aid. Community colleges received 33% of federal aid in the form of pell grants while they received 16% of federal work study and 21% of federal supplemental educational opportunity grants (AACC, 2014).

For the most part, Bourke et al. (2009) found that the students had positive experiences and expressed satisfaction as well as contentment with their decision to attend a two-year institution. The students felt as if they received a quality education and necessary skills to be successful. Although many of the portrayals they examined were positive, there were also some negative portrayals. Bourke et al. (2009) cited an example from the television show *Roseanne* in which Becky gives her husband money, previously given to her to attend class at a community college, to enroll in an auto-mechanics course at a two-year institution. Becky and Mark realize that if Mark completes the course, the financial benefits and professional growth are more beneficial to the couple. However, Mark withdraws from the course after he realizes that college is not for him as he lacks commitment to his studies (Bourke et al., 2009). Like Mark, some in fictional portrayals lack the ability to succeed or the drive to achieve his or her goals. Bourke et al. (2009) contended that these characters usually fail to succeed due to their lack of motivation or desire to attend college, actions which the researchers stated were reflective of the students and not the institution (Bourke et al., 2009).

Another study (Tucciarone, 2007) examined the image of the community college in a 2001 movie titled *Evolution*. However, Tucciarone (2007) discussed that only one other study concerning the image of the community college has been conducted and that the existing scholarship fails to address how students, both current and future, “make meaning about the community college image” (p. 39). The study conducted prior to

Tucciarone's study is LaPaglia's (1994) study. She used a content analysis methodology to examine stereotypes in fiction as well as those same stereotypes in real life. The researcher asked 37 individuals, who included 23 students and 14 faculty, to keep journals. In performing a content analysis of both fiction and the journals, she found that the journals expressed a joy of learning, which was a fairly consistent theme found throughout the journals, but this was not the case with fictional portrayals, as only a few captured this joy. In addition, LaPaglia (1994) found differences between the way teachers and students perceived instructors as compared with fictional representations at two-year community colleges. In real life, students thought the instructors were knowledgeable and nurturing as compared with the mundane and boring instructors that were presented in fiction. LaPaglia (1994) reported that fictional portrayals do not portray the diversity of community college students as the media portrayals failed to include minority students, whereas the students and faculty in their journals expressed an awareness of diversity. This lack of diversity that is absent from media portrayals are characteristic of films produced during the 1980s, and this raises concerns about social injustice. The social injustice is that there is little, if any, diversity present within these films, and as such, the concerns of the White majority are those that are conveyed to viewers, while the concerns of minorities are ignored.

While only a few studies have examined higher education, focusing primarily on four-year institutions and their representation in motion pictures and television shows, the majority of these studies (Bourke, 2013; Hinton, 1994; Osborn, 1990; Schuth, 1972; Umphlett, 1984) took the form of a content analysis, although Bourke's (2013) study goes a step beyond a content analysis as he considers the possible implications of college-

themed movies on international students. The few studies (Bourke et al., 2009; LaPaglia, 1994; Tucciarone, 2007) that have been published that focus on the community college's portrayal in television and film used a content analysis methodology. One study (Hess, 2012) used a theoretical framework, which was composed of education, communication, and film theory, to examine the reel versus the real role of higher education administrators in movies. Although Hess' (2012) study did not use critical media literacy to examine the depiction of administrators in the media, he recommended that this framework could be used to examine this issue or similar issues as he stressed the importance of teaching individuals to think critically about the information they consume via the media. Considering the research published to date has failed to examine critical media literacy in regard to higher education, this study sought to establish a link between higher education, particularly focusing on community colleges, and critical media literacy, thus laying a foundation for future studies. The lack of research necessitated a need to examine the representation of community colleges in the media to examine if these portrayals, and perhaps the social injustice present within them, contributed to an individual's image of these institutions. In addition, this study also examined if these media portrayals influence students' decisions concerning college.

Image of Community Colleges

DeGenaro (2006) asserted that the establishment of junior colleges began in 1901 when Joliet Junior College was founded. He maintained that junior colleges were created "to make higher education a socially useful endeavor" and "to shape the consciousness of the culture around shared values" (p. 531). DeGenaro (2006) emphasized that the media, magazines in particular, were supportive of this new concept of the community college in

higher education and even praised community colleges for benefiting society. Stressing the pragmatism of the institution, he wrote, “College founders had enough respect for utilitarianism that they literally built their system of learning around lived experiences” as opposed to traditional curriculums (p. 532). The media supported the college’s vocational mission and programs as they evolved over time and regarded them as preparation for individuals to be productive members of society. In doing so, the media served as public relations practitioners for the college. They helped to spread the mission of these institutions as well as how they differed from traditional colleges and universities. The media were instrumental in the establishment of community colleges as they presented community colleges positively, which suppressed public opinion and added credibility to these two-year institutions (DeGenaro, 2006).

Despite the media’s attempt to raise awareness, Townsend (1986) suggested that the purpose of the community college is not understood by many individuals. She believed that the success of community colleges is due to their diverse offerings. She thought that in order for the institution to affirm or solidify its mission, the community college must choose a mission or a direction that it wishes to develop in, thus allowing it to put forth an image. Townsend (1986) maintained that despite its image problem, there are a number of positive attributes associated with the community college. Describing these positive attributes, she explained that the community college has successfully made college accessible through affordable tuition, and it provides individuals with an opportunity to be successful despite previous academic performance. In addition, the community college is responsive to community needs, offers a diverse curriculum for students, and focuses on excellent teaching (Townsend, 1986).

While Townsend (1986) contended that open admission is a positive attribute associated with the community college, not all critics agree. Thelin (2004) thought that the concept of open-access may be the most misunderstood aspect of the community college. Savage (1989) argued that many individuals see the open access policy of the community college as a sign of the institution's poor quality as it accepts anyone who applies. He suggested that this perception will change over time as many community colleges are considered young institutions. He also believed that perceptions will change as more individuals become acquainted with the institution either through their own enrollment or hearing of others who have had experience with the institution (Savage, 1989). Similarly, Cowles (1991) discussed that the expansive mission and multiple offerings of the community college make it challenging for two-year institutions to solidify an image. She commented that the problem may not be a lack of an image but that the institution does not have a consistent image, as the college is always offering new programs or shifting and changing current offerings to appease the community.

With the constant changes that occur at the two-year institution, Cowles (1991) argued that it is difficult for the community college to position itself in the minds of consumers, and she wrote that before any positioning can occur, the institution has to possess a thorough understanding of its own image. Emphasizing this diversity, she detailed, "The genius of the community college system is that it involves both technical and transfer education" (Cowles, 1991, p. 9). However, she thought that technical or vocational training is bothersome to many as it is considered terminal training. Many individuals believe that once students pursue this vocational or technical path they are stuck in this type of training. She contended that in order to combat this idea of

vocational and technical training as terminal education, community colleges need to offer these individuals options that would allow them to pursue an academic program or degree if they so desired at a later time (Cowles, 1991).

In a study assessing faculty and senior-level administrators' attitudes toward institutional direction, Townsend (1986) stated that 88% of the administration and 76% of faculty reported that they would like their campus to move toward a direction of a comprehensive community college campus. Also, 80% of administration and nearly 77% of faculty expressed that they would like to see the community colleges in the State University of New York (SUNY) system move toward a comprehensive community college campus. A comprehensive community college places equal focus on academics, vocational, and community programs. In the same survey, faculty were asked to report their preferred image for their campus as well as for the SUNY system. Administrators preferred "a college for its community" image for their campus and the system while faculty preferred the image of excellence in teaching for both their campus and the community college system that is part of SUNY (Townsend, 1986, p. 320). The findings illustrated that the administrators selected the image of excellence in teaching for their campus as well as for the community colleges within the SUNY system as their second preferred image. For its second preferred image, the faculty selected "a college for its community" for their campus, and the image of a comprehensive model for the community colleges within the system (Townsend, 1986, p. 320).

In analyzing the results of her survey, Townsend (1986) reported that it was not surprising that the faculty wanted the image of excellence of teaching. However, she was surprised to find that faculty and administrators were so closely aligned in their

institutional direction and image for the two-year institution, thereby suggesting that it should not be that difficult for administrators and faculty to agree on a mission for the institution. She also stated that “a college for its community” and excellence in teaching are really the hallmark characteristics of a community college as well as defining elements contained within its mission (Townsend, 1986, p. 320). She explained that as the community college tailors its offerings to the community, it becomes student-centered and community-oriented (Townsend, 1986).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This qualitative study attempted to describe the media's influence on undergraduate-level college students who decided to enroll in two-year institutions. The study consisted of semi-structured interviews and employed media clips that portrayed community colleges and their students. Gibbs, Friese, and Mangabeira (2002) claimed that technology now allows qualitative researchers to use videos and electronic images as data for a study as well as to incorporate these components in the data collection process. Because this study was concerned with how students make meaning of the media, students were asked to listen to and view four short media clips. After listening to and watching the clips, the participants were asked to respond to questions that inquired about their attitudes toward the content concerning community college students. The participants were asked if they feel as if these media clips were reflective of community colleges and their students. In addition, the participants were asked if these media portrayals influenced their decision to enroll in a two-year institution. This study addressed two research questions.

Research Questions

R1: What did the participants learn about community colleges from media portrayals of these institutions?

R2: How did these media portrayals influence the participants' decisions to attend or enroll in a two-year community college?

Research Design and Procedures

The study sample consisted of community college students who had completed at least one semester in a Mississippi public community college. The researcher obtained permission to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) (see Appendix A for IRB approval letter) as well as from the administration of MGCCC and PRCC that were used as sites to conduct interviews in Mississippi.

Positionality

As a language arts instructor employed for the past seven years with a public community college in Mississippi and as a graduate of a community college, the researcher understood that her analysis of community colleges in the media may appear biased. To prevent the researcher's own feelings from entering the study and to refrain from influencing research participants, Merriam (1995) indicated that the study should contain a "Statement of researcher's experiences, assumptions, biases—presenting the orientation, biases, and so on, of the researcher at the outset of the study" (p. 55). Merriam (1995) advised that in revealing this information, readers may have a better understanding as to why the researcher analyzed and/or interpreted the data in a particular manner.

Although the researcher realized the importance of two-year institutions in expanding access and creating opportunities for many in higher education, she was also aware of her job as a researcher in eliminating bias from her study. As she collected data and analyzed the results, she remained neutral with regard to the content of this study. If she had comments or thoughts that emerged as a result of a research participant's

responses, she made use of field notes to refrain from reacting verbally, which may influence the research participant. Likewise, the researcher refrained from gesturing or showing visible emotion that likewise could show that the researcher agrees or disagrees with the research participant's responses. Also, the researcher did not reveal that she is employed by or affiliated with a community college or state her beliefs about community colleges to research participants. The researcher employed these strategies to minimize any influence that she may have on research participants.

As an additional measure to remain objective, the researcher used what Merriam (1995) referred to as peer examinations and an audit trail. The researcher asked her peers to make sure that the findings were plausible with regard to the data that she collected. In other words, a few of the researcher's colleagues read the findings of the study to ensure that they were consistent with the data that emerged from the interviews. Doing so ensured that the researcher was not biased and that her findings and analysis were in line with the data that the researcher collected. Similarly, the researcher used an audit trail as she detailed the exact methodology and how decisions were made with regard to analyzing data and selecting themes. The researcher recorded all decisions that were made and explained the rationale for the decisions, in case another researcher wishes to replicate this study. In doing so, the researcher's methodology appeared transparent, thus providing the rationale for each decision that the researcher made (Merriam, 1988). This allowed readers to understand every aspect of the data analysis process and how and why the researcher interpreted the data in the manner in which she did.

Data Collection

After the researcher received IRB approval, data collection began during the last week in February 2014 and lasted through the middle of March 2014 on the campuses of two Mississippi community colleges. The researcher decided to examine community colleges in the state of Mississippi as the state is consistently ranked as possessing one of the lower per capita household incomes and as one that has the lowest educational attainment among residents of any state (NCES, 2012; U. S. Census Bureau, 2013). In addition, Mississippi has a long-standing history of community colleges and a robust community college system that offers opportunities to students, complete with 15 community colleges that provide both competitive athletics and residential-living opportunities (Young & Ewing, 1978). In discussing this notion, Williams (1978) asserts, “Perhaps in no other state, where incomes were so low and needs so great, has institutionalized education contributed more than through the junior colleges of Mississippi (p. xiii). PRCC was selected as a site of data collection as Young and Ewing (1978) contended that the community college, originally founded as Pearl River Agricultural High School (PRAHS), is Mississippi’s oldest community college. PRAHS offered college coursework one year prior to the passage of Senate Bill 251. Although PRCC is the state’s oldest community college, MGCCC, with the addition of its Jefferson Davis and Jackson County campuses became “the first junior college in the state and one of the first in the nation to operate a branch system” (Young & Ewing, 1978, p. 115).

At these data collection sites, the researcher interviewed 12 research participants. Six of the interviews took place at MGCCC, and the other six took place at PRCC.

Data collection consisted of 12 semi-structured interviews that lasted approximately 50-60 minutes each (see Appendix B for interview protocol). The shortest interview lasted approximately 40 minutes while the longest interview lasted about 70 minutes. The majority of the interviews lasted between 50-60 minutes. Creswell (2013) wrote that a sample may consist of as few as one research participant, or a sample may contain more individuals, if they are needed “to develop a collective story” (p. 157). The exact number of research participants, 12-15 for this study, was dependent on the researcher achieving data saturation, which in this case occurred after the 12th participant was interviewed when no new information emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As data saturation was achieved after the 12th participant was interviewed, no additional interviews were conducted. Once the researcher achieved data saturation, she concluded data collection.

Interview Process

Research participants were recruited for personal interviews which explored undergraduate students’ attitudes concerning whether media portrayals influenced them as they made the decision to attend a two-year college. Purposeful sampling or criterion-based sampling, specifically snowball sampling, was used to recruit research participants who were over the age of 18 and had attended a community college for at least one semester. As snowball sampling was used to identify participants, the first participant was asked to name another community college student who possessed similar interests in media portrayals. Participants also provided contact information, either email addresses or telephone numbers for those students that they recommended. The researcher then contacted these students via email or telephone to arrange a time when they could meet. Participant selection continued in this manner throughout the interview process. In two

cases, the participants who completed the interview located the person he or she recommended and brought that individual to the researcher. Then, the researcher made arrangements with that individual to complete the interview at his or her convenience. The process of recruiting participants via snowball sampling occurred much more quickly than the research initially anticipated. Once participants found out they had been referred to participate, they were very eager to assist the researcher with the data collection process. The researcher conducted the first six interviews at MGCCC, and after doing so, she conducted the remaining six interviews at PRCC. At PRCC, she used criterion-based sampling and identified a student who was knowledgeable about popular culture. After conducting this interview, she once again asked the participant to recommend a student who possessed similar knowledge and would be interested in participating in the interview.

At the beginning of each interview, the study's purpose was explained to each research participant. The researcher told each research participant that his or her participation was strictly voluntary and that the process was completely anonymous to encourage research participants to speak openly and honestly. Interviews were completed in areas that were quiet, primarily in classrooms, offices, or conference rooms that were not in use. In these settings, participants talked freely and openly, and none of the interviews were interrupted by other individuals, although two of the interviews were interrupted by the participants' ringing cellular devices.

After explaining the purpose of the study, the researcher presented each participant with a consent form, and the participant was asked to read, sign, and date the form. After the participant filled out the form, the researcher queued each media clip in

order to prevent long breaks during the interviews. This process kept the interviews moving along smoothly and prevented any unnatural breaks. After asking three or four questions to begin each interview, the researcher placed her personal laptop on the participant's desktop or tabletop and played the first media clip. The media clips were minimized on the researcher's laptop and then maximized once it was time to play that particular video clip. After the participant watched each clip, the researcher would ask the participant questions about that particular media clip. Once the participant had answered the questions, the researcher would play the next clip for the participant to watch, and after doing so, she would ask the participants questions pertaining to that clip. This process continued in the same manner until the participant watched all four media clips. A number of participants articulated that they had seen the media clips before and that they were very familiar with the clips. However, they also stated that they had never paid close attention to the lyrics of Atkins' (2006) song and/or questioned the content of the clips until the researcher asked them about the content of each media clip.

Impediments in Data Collection

As the data collection process moved along smoothly, the researcher did not encounter any major obstacles during the interviews; however, identifying the first research participant to interview was somewhat challenging. The researcher had identified a MGCCC student who possessed an in-depth knowledge of popular culture. In the Fall 2013 semester, the researcher overheard a student talking about a television show that contained a number of references to community college. The researcher happened to know the name of this particular student as she was involved on campus, and she made a mental note of this.

Once IRB approved this project, she approached the student and made arrangements to interview this student. On the day that the researcher was scheduled to interview the student, the researcher learned that the student was ill. The researcher was unaware as to the length of the student's unavailability, so the researcher made the decision to identify another research participant to move forward with data collection. In order to locate the first participant at MGCCC and subsequently at PRCC, the researcher had to talk to a number of individuals. She asked these students questions to gauge their knowledge relating to popular culture and even asked students if they knew anyone who was interested in popular culture. The researcher found that some students lacked interest in the media altogether. A number of people that the researcher talked to possessed knowledge of popular culture, but not the level of knowledge needed for this interview. Eventually, the researcher identified a MGCCC student who possessed a proficient knowledgeable of media portrayals and had been a community college student for two semesters. Likewise, at PRCC, the researcher was able to identify a student who was knowledgeable about the media from talking to other students.

Another minor setback was the researcher's inability to schedule interviews for early morning and afternoons at PRCC. Some participants at PRCC were available each morning but only had an afternoon or two that they were available, so this prolonged the data collection process a few days. As the researcher worked full-time, her schedule was somewhat limited with regard to when she could collect data. Also, in traveling to PRCC, she would lose another hour. As a result, the researcher had to collect the majority of her data at PRCC during the late afternoons and early evenings; however, two or three of the interviews at MGCCC took place during the morning hours. During the late

afternoons and early evenings, the researcher encountered students who were willing to participate but who were studying for night classes and working on group projects. In addition to these aspects, there was very little activity during the weekends at PRCC. The researcher's first visit to PRCC occurred on a Saturday, and it was completely unsuccessful. Although there were some cars in the parking lot on a Saturday morning, there were very few people walking around. Since PRCC is a residential campus, the researcher thought that she would encounter individuals walking around campus and dining in the cafeteria, but that was not the case. After realizing the lack of activity during the weekends, she had to visit PRCC as her schedule allowed during the week. During the late afternoons and early evenings, there was a large presence of older, non-traditional students on campus.

Instrumentation

Merriam (2009) wrote that interviews are the most common method used to collect data in a qualitative study. She suggested that interviews are needed as human behavior and people's perceptions cannot be understood or interpreted. Therefore, interviews are a technique that researchers used to collect data that allows them to understand why people behave in a certain manner and how people construct their feelings based on real-life issues and events. In order to understand if research participants make meaning of media portrayals of community colleges and if these media portrayals influence students to enroll in two-year institutions, the researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol to structure the interview. Merriam (2009) explained that this means that the questions consisted of "a mix of more and less structured questions" (p. 90) but that the exact wording or ordering of the questions is not predetermined. The

interview protocol served only as a reminder of the various aspects of an issue to examine, and the research questions evolved as the research participant took the lead during the interview (Merriam, 2009). The one-on-one interviews were recorded using a data recorder, and the researcher transcribed them shortly after the interviews were completed.

Media Clips

As part of the interviews, the researcher asked participants to listen to one audio clip and view three video clips. The first two clips that participants were asked to watch or listen to portrayed community colleges negatively while the last two clips portrayed community colleges positively. The researcher employed her judgment and knowledge of community colleges to include media clips that showcased common stereotypes and social injustices that are often associated with these institutions. The researcher decided to use primarily media clips on the basis of their appeal to a large audience as opposed to the readers of fiction. Emphasizing this idea, Hinton (1994) noted, “The most insignificant ‘B movie’ might enjoy in one city alone an audience larger than a novel’s nationwide readership. For the reason that Hinton states, the college novel must receive different consideration from the college film” (p. 7). As with commercially produced movies, the same is true with television as these forms of entertainment are directed at a mass number of individuals (Hinton, 1994). Also, the findings of the Neilson (2012) *Cross-Platform Report* illustrated that watching television and movies is a pastime for a large number of individuals.

The first clip that research participants were asked to listen to was from Rodney Atkins’ (2006) song “These Are My People.” The lyrics to this song stated, “We got

some discount knowledge at the junior college where we majored in beer and girls” (Atkins, 2006). This song was Atkins’ third song to be named a Number One single, and Atkins said that the song shows that people are all very similar. He believed the song is a celebration of common people (Andreeva, 2007). In addition to its celebration of everyday life, the lyrics imply that the two-year institution is a place where students receive “discount” or inferior knowledge (Atkins, 2006). This notion is a common stereotype and a social injustice that is often associated with the community college and one that is often portrayed in the media (Tucciarone, 2007).

After listening to Atkins’ (2006) song, research participants were asked to watch a media clip from *Tosh.0* (Zabielski, McAdams, & Judge, 2012). In 2005, Daniel Tosh, the host of the show was named one of the “10 Comics to Watch,” and five years later, his tour, “Tosh Tour Twenty Ten: A Comedy Central Live Event,” sold out in each of the fifty-plus cities which hosted the event (Comedy Central, 2014). The first season of this television show premiered in 2009, and each episode averaged one million viewers (Andreeva, 2009). The summer premiere of *Tosh.0*’s second season boasted approximately two million viewers and was the most watched show of all television shows with males aged 18-24 and the most watched show on cable with males aged 18-34 (TV News Desk, 2010).

Based on this information, we might infer that *Tosh.0* (Tosh et al., 2009-2013) appeals to college-aged males (TV News Desk, 2010), and as the average age of community college students is 28 (AACC, 2014), this show attracts both non-traditional and traditional students. Considering the demographics at community colleges as well as the viewership of *Tosh.0* (Tosh et al., 2009-2013), the researcher thought that this show is

one that male research participants would be familiar with and can relate to, even if they are not familiar with the show. In this clip from *Tosh.0* (Zabielski et al., 2012), a community college student who is skateboarding collides with an older woman, a non-traditional student who is on her way to class at a two-year institution. Narrating the collision as it occurs, Tosh (Zabielski et al., 2012) exclaimed

Just another day at community college where kids who can't get into a state school share a campus with old people who want to learn computers. . . . Maybe this would not have happened, if you were not 45 years late to class.

This clip captures the social injustice that is present with regard to the media's portrayal of non-traditional students. Even if research participants are not familiar with the show, they are likely to be familiar with having classes with a non-traditional student who has decided to take classes at the local community college.

After listening to Atkins' (2006) song and watching the clip from *Tosh.0* (Zabielski et al., 2012) that presented community colleges negatively, research participants were asked to watch two video clips that portrayed the community college in a positive manner. The remaining two video clips are from the pilot episode of *Community* (Harmon et al., 2009). This television series chronicles the daily lives of its characters, who are all members of the same study group but possess diverse backgrounds with regard to race and age. As diversity is currently increasing at community colleges, Fain (2012) believed that the creators of the show effectively portray community college life and issues plaguing these institutions. For example, he wrote that *Community* pokes fun at real-life issues, such as "turf battles between departments, overly ambitious administrators, underprepared students and relentless

budget cutting” (Fain, 2012, para. 5). In addition to portraying these issues accurately, Fain (2012) noted that the show incorporates “recession-related anxieties. Employment and career reinvention make for rich material, it seems, so community college resonates today in part because of the economic downturn” (para. 16).

Even though the show focuses on issues stemming from the economy, it also emphasized the daily lives of college students as they form relationships with each other. In trying to unite the study group, one student, Jeff Winger pointed out to the other members of the group that people can find the good in anything but often fail to see the good in themselves. Critiquing the positive characteristics of each individual, Winger reminded the group that each member is better than he or she thinks he or she is. As the members start to see the good in themselves, Winger stated that the individuals have stopped becoming a study group and are moving toward creating something that is unstoppable, which is a community (Harmon et al., 2009). This scene illustrated the social development of community college students who form relationships with each other. Eddinger (as cited in Shiffman, 2014) indicated that students learn better together when they are surrounded by friends and cohorts, which makes for a positive experience for all who are involved.

After the participant viewed the third media clip, the researcher advanced the pilot episode of *Community* (Harmon et al., 2009) to show students a scene that occurs later in the show, which was the fourth video clip that participants watched. In this scene, Psychology Professor Ian Duncan learned that Jeff Winger has been disbarred as a lawyer by the state due to his presentation of false credentials. After becoming aware of this situation, Professor Duncan encouraged Winger to make the most of his new-found

opportunity at Greendale Community College and to make something positive of himself. Advising and encouraging Winger, Professor Duncan said, “What you have, my friend, is a second chance at an honest life” (Harmon et al., 2009). While the community college provides younger students with an opportunity to earn a college education, the community college serves a variety of individuals, such as Winger who is a non-traditional student. For many non-traditional students, the community college is their second attempt to achieve success in life.

After the presentation of each media clip, the participants were asked a series of questions regarding their attitudes toward community colleges and their students. Participants were encouraged to express their ideas concerning the accuracy of the media’s portrayal of community colleges and their students and if these ideas in the media influenced their decision to enroll at a two-year institution. Also, participants were asked if their attitudes concerning community colleges changed after viewing the media clips.

Data Analysis

As interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and examined along with the researcher’s notes. Once the first interview was transcribed, the researcher analyzed the interview to make sure that the interview items solicited direct responses. The researcher continued conducting interviews and analyzing the content throughout the interview process. Describing the importance of continual analysis throughout the data collection process, Merriam (2009) conveyed, “Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed” (p. 171). After data saturation was achieved and once the data collection

process was complete, the transcript read as questions and answers, and it was saved as a file on the researcher's computer. Data collection and management are the first two steps in the data analysis spiral that Creswell (2013) described. This spiral approach suggested that researchers take an analytical approach toward the phenomenon that they are examining. Using this spiral, Creswell (2013) suggested that researchers begin with collecting data, and as they move through the interrelated and intertwined spirals, researchers end with their account, a narrative in this case. The third step of the data analysis spiral was what Creswell (2013) termed "Reading and Memoing" (p. 183). In this step, the researcher read the transcribed interview several times to gain familiarity with the type of information contained within the transcripts. As the researcher became familiar with the information contained in the transcripts, she made notes as ideas emerged (Creswell, 2013). The third step of this model was coding the data. The researcher coded the data and formed categories, which Creswell (2013) indicated is "the heart of qualitative data analysis" (p. 184). Creswell (2013) urged researchers to create a list of at least 25 codes but no more than 30. In this step, the researcher found evidence in the transcripts that suggested that an excerpt of transcribed information should be labeled as a specific code.

After coding the data, Creswell (2013) maintained that the researcher will want to look at the data holistically and then develop no more than six themes, suggesting five or six themes was generally the acceptable number for most publications. The development of themes was part of the interpretative process, which was the next step of the data analysis spiral that Creswell (2013) explicated. As the researcher looked to develop themes, the researcher used what Riessman (2008) has termed thematic analysis, which

refers to an analytical approach that occurs as the researcher analyzes the data imparted by the research participant. This was an appropriate strategy for this study as the researcher was interested in examining how students deduce meaning from these media portrayals and how these media portrayals influenced students to enroll in two-year institutions.

Once themes were identified, exhaustive categories were established, and themes were assigned to specific categories and analyzed appropriately. The researcher examined the categories in relation to each other to see if a relationship existed among all or any of the categories. Then the researcher used a narrative analysis to see if and how the media portrayals influenced participants' decisions to enroll in a community college. The narrative focused on the exchange of information—the spoken words and dialogue—that emerged as a result of the interview. The narrative was the last step, which was a representation and visualization of the data (Creswell, 2013).

Limitations

External validity/transferability. While the results of this study were unable to be generalized to the wider population as are the results of quantitative research, the results allowed the researcher to understand the attitudes of the participants with regard to how media portrayals influenced their decision to enroll in a Mississippi community college. Using a qualitative research methodology allowed the researcher to understand the attitudes and beliefs of the participants in a manner that is detailed and thorough, which was the purpose of this particular study (Merriam, 2009).

Internal validity/credibility. Credibility or internal validity concerns the degree to which the findings of a study are representative of how people construct reality (Merriam,

2009). Merriam (1995) explicated that qualitative researchers, in effect, offer their interpretations of how other individuals perceive reality, as there are multiple constructions of reality instead of just one. Merriam (2009) asserted that although internal validity can be a weakness of other types of research, it is actually an advantage or strength of qualitative research. In this type of research, the researcher is closer to the participant, compared to quantitative researchers when a survey instrument exists between the researcher and the participant. To ensure that the study maintains internal validity, the researcher interviewed research participants who held various perspectives, and there was also active engagement until data collection resulted in data saturation (Merriam, 2009). In addition to these steps, the researcher also employed what Merriam (1995) called “member checks” (p. 54) and “peer/colleague examination” (p. 55). As the researcher employed member checks and peer examinations, she asked her peers whether they found the information plausible during the data analysis phase. In order to facilitate an understanding of the researcher’s interpretation, Merriam (1995) indicated that the researcher should provide an excerpt that addressed her biases, and the researcher provided this information under the heading *Positionality* located earlier in this chapter.

Reliability/dependability. Merriam (2009) wrote that reliability refers to the likelihood of a study to be duplicated to produce the same results, but she also noted that this is not a goal of qualitative research, as this type of research seeks to understand human behavior as there are multiple perspectives and many interpretations. Instead of replicating a study to achieve the same result, Merriam (1995) indicated that the goal of the qualitative researcher is not reliability but rather dependability. Explaining this concept, Merriam (2009) said, “The more important question for qualitative research is

whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p. 221). In other words, the results should be in line with and make sense in regard to the information that was collected. As long as the study does so, it contains dependability, and to ensure that this study contains dependability, the researcher used peer examinations and provided details about data collection and data analysis (Merriam, 1995).

Confirmability/objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that confirmability occurs when the researcher acts objectively and focuses solely on the data. This limitation of confirmability would be referred to as objectivity in quantitative research. To establish confirmability, the researcher used a reflective journal. This allowed the researcher to write down notes and information pertaining to methodological decisions that she made as well as the rationale for those decisions. In addition, this journal allowed the researcher to reflect on the various parts of the study as they occurred with regard to her attitudes, beliefs, and values. This act of reflecting allowed the researcher to emphasize the data without the researcher’s attitudes influencing and interfering with the data. Although the researcher used the research journal to establish confirmability, it can also be used to establish credibility, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

Interviews were conducted with 12 research participants during March 2014, and the data collected during those interviews were transcribed. The research participants were Mississippi community college students who had been enrolled for at least one semester in a community college. Interviews were conducted on the campuses of PRCC and MGCCC, primarily in empty classrooms, conference rooms, or vacant offices.

Data Analysis

Research Participants

Participants were selected who were currently enrolled in community colleges and had been enrolled in PRCC or MGCCC for at least one semester prior to the interview. Six of the interviews took place at PRCC, while the other six took place at MGCCC. All of the participants in this study were full-time students. The participants ranged in age from 18-43 years of age, and nine of the 12 participants were White, two of the participants were Black, and one was Asian. There were an equal number of female participants as there were males. Two of the 12 participants were veterans, and one of the veterans had attained a successful career as a result of the skills he acquired in the military. One of the veterans was retired after 20 years of military service while the other veteran had served eight years. As far as social class was concerned, three individuals stated they were members of the lower class, while eight of the participants identified as members of the middle class, although one specified lower-middle class, while one identified as upper-middle class. One participant identified his social class as upper class.

Four of the participants were married with children, and these individuals had returned to school after having a family. Eight of the participants were single, while two of these participants were single parents, although one of these participants had previously been married. One individual worked full-time, while two individuals worked multiple part-time jobs. One participant was employed as a student-worker on campus, three other students were employed part-time and worked one job, while one student was self-employed, and three students were unemployed (Table 1).

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant's Name	Age	Race	Gender	Social Class	Marital Status	Children	Employment Status	Military Service in Years
Barbara	18	White	Female	Low-Middle	Single	0	None	None
Debra	19	White	Female	Middle	Single	0	Employed	None
Frank	43	White	Male	Middle	Married	2	Retired	20
Jamal	28	Black	Male	Low	Married	2	Employed Part-time	None
Jessica	20	White	Female	Low	Single	0	Employed Part-time	None
John	19	White	Male	Middle	Single	0	Employed Part-time	None
Joseph	36	White	Male	Upper	Married	2	Employed Full-time	6
Michael	19	White	Male	Middle	Single	0	Employed Part-time	None
Linda	24	White	Female	Upper-Middle	Single	1	Employed Part-time	None
Tamara	39	Black	Female	Middle	Married	3	Self-employed	None
Thuy	36	Asian	Female	Middle	Divorced	1	None	None
Thomas	23	White	Male	Low	Single	0	None	None

Note. All names are pseudonyms.

As the researcher explained the purpose of the study, she encouraged participants to speak honestly and openly. In doing so, she assumed that research participants would respond truthfully to the interview items. She assumed that their responses would be based on their own knowledge and experiences. In addition, the researcher assumed that all participants would possess knowledge about media portrayals that feature community colleges and their students. The researcher extended an invitation to the first research participant, and then at the conclusion of the interview, each participant was asked to provide the name of a student he or she thought would be knowledgeable of the media and willing to participate in the study. The students who were identified by research participants were asked to participate in the study as they had knowledge of the media. As a result of their knowledge and insights concerning media portrayals, these students could contribute information that may inform this study's research questions:

R1: What did the participants learn about community colleges from media portrayals of these institutions?

R2: How did these media portrayals influenced the participants' decisions to attend or enroll in a two-year community college?

Anonymous Data and Data Analysis

As stated in the IRB application, the researcher proctored the research participants' identity throughout the data collection process. To ensure anonymity, the researcher used pseudonyms to refer to individuals. Therefore, the researcher did not reveal the participants' real names or any identifying factors to refer to these individuals to protect the research participants. In order to protect the identity of the research participants, the researcher used pseudonyms to refer to them.

The following themes emerged through thematic coding of the data analysis process:

1. Community colleges create opportunities.
2. Community colleges offer a quality education.
3. Pejorative messages are inaccurate regarding community college students.
4. Community colleges embody a sense of community.
5. The media make fun of community colleges because of their perception.

Theme One: Community Colleges Create Opportunities

Community colleges offer a variety of opportunities for students, including both traditional and non-traditional students. Two-year institutions are an affordable alternative to four-year institutions as tuition is less expensive at a community college than at a university. In addition to their affordability, community colleges are conveniently located and offer flexibly scheduled courses that accommodate single parents and employed individuals. Many non-traditional students are returning to college to further their education, and in many cases, the community college offers these students a second chance to pursue a college education. Although many non-traditional students return to the classroom, many traditional students begin their education at a two-year institution.

Reasons to Attend

Almost all of the study's research participants stated that they decided to attend community college because of the price of tuition. Many of the research participants noted that spending two years completing basic coursework at the community college is much more affordable than attending four years at a college or university. Linda, a single

parent of one child and an employee who works two jobs, said that the community college “was cheaper, closer to home. I could afford it.” Likewise, Jessica, a single female who works two jobs, explained, “one of the main reasons why I came here because it is cheaper.”

Also, with regard to tuition costs, Tamara, a married woman who is self-employed and mother of three children, claimed she knew students who are pursuing undergraduate degrees from four-year institutions, and these students would enroll in the community college during the summers to earn credits because it is more affordable. “I know people who come here [to the community college] in the summer to complete courses that are given at the university, and it [*sic*] transfers and counts the same way.” She asserted that these individuals earn their credits through hard work, which she emphasized is the same way they earn credits at a university. In completing courses at the community college, students are able to earn the same credit, but as the community college tuition is lower than most four-year institutions, students are able to save on tuition and complete additional courses, if they decide to.

Not only did research participants suggest that the price of tuition at a community college is less expensive than a four-year institution, but attending community college allows them to gain work experience and to live at home, thus saving money on housing expenses. Barbara, a traditional student who is unemployed, noted that her parents were experiencing financial hardships, so she enrolled in the local community college to prevent her parents from incurring additional debt. “First of all, my dad just opened up a small business, so money was tight. . . . And I have gotten a bunch of scholarships here.”

Echoing this idea of financial assistance, another participant, Joseph, who had spent a number of years in the Air Force working in aviation, asserted that the G. I. Bill was paying for his tuition. He returned to the college nearly a decade after he began his studies at an out-of-state university, which he attended prior to his military service. After serving in the military, he realized that it was beneficial for him to pursue his college degree as the G. I. Bill covered his tuition, so he merely has to complete the courses to earn his degree. Likewise, Frank, an Army veteran, was also using the benefits of the G. I. Bill to pay his college tuition and related expenses; as he pointed out, “The G. I. Bill pays my tuition, [which] is really to my advantage to complete these courses, especially considering someone else [the federal government] is paying for them.”

Although tuition is an influential factor for many students, a number of research participants indicated that they needed courses that were offered at flexible times, including day, evening, weekend, short-term, and online classes. These students who needed a flexible schedule often had a young child or children that they were raising. Linda described how the community college’s class schedule accommodates her family responsibilities:

Um, I have a little boy, and I can’t really go to a university or anything right now.

This is close to home. Affordable. And, the schedule, you can do day or night, so it works with my son.

Some research participants even had children in school, and the variety of flexible course offerings allows them to take classes around their children’s schedules or when their children are in school. Tamara noted that she was able to get two of her children ready

for school and drop them off. After doing so, she would drive to the community college to take classes. Explicating how the community college fits her schedule, she said

I have a daughter that is at the university. And I needed something that fit the schedule between carpooling my children to school and handling business that I needed to do. It fit into my schedule. I originally started here, so I wanted to finish the degree here.

She firmly asserted that she wanted to complete her degree to show her children the importance of finishing what she started nearly 10 years ago. She expressed the idea that she wanted her children to see her as a model, so they would strive to achieve similar accomplishments. Likewise, Joseph, a husband who also is employed full-time and father of two children, indicated that he decided to enroll at the community college because he wanted to show his children that they can achieve their goals through sacrifice and dedication. Articulating this idea of attaining one's goal, he smiled widely and gleamed proudly as he boasted, "And pretty much proving to my kids that no matter what you set your mind to, your goal, you can accomplish it." A few of the research participants expressed that they were single parents, family-oriented individuals, full- or part-time employees, and community college students. They stressed that it was very difficult to juggle all of their responsibilities and to give each of their roles their full attention and effort.

While family played a significant role in some participants' decision to enroll in a community college, Jessica, who did not have any children, stated that she was attending community college to provide a better life for her future children, or as she expounded, "So I can give whatever children I bring into this world a good life." She, along with

others, stated that if she prepares now for a career, that one day she would be financially stable and not have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. As a result, she would be able to provide for her own family and not have to depend on anyone else to do so.

Another research participant, John, who was a first-generation college student and part-time employee, explained, “My parents really did not want me to go to college and no other reason like that. I just figured [I needed a college education] to be a more well-rounded person.” He enrolled in community college for his own self-improvement, contrary to his parents’ wishes. John also pointed out that he thinks the community college offers a great first opportunity for students who are attending college for the first time; Tamara echoed this idea when she stated that those students who have just graduated high school have not failed at anything. She went on to say that if people look at these recent graduates as failures because of their enrollment at the community college, “We give them a non-passing grade in life.”

Second Chances

In addition to offering opportunities for recent high school graduates, the community college is an institution that offers other types of students second chances, which was a theme portrayed in one of the media clips (Harmon et al., 2009) that research participants watched. A number of the research participants noted that attending community college was not their primary goal. Instead, they ended up attending community college after their first goal was short-lived or did not work out. For example, Michael, a traditional student and part-time employee, noted that he had received athletic scholarships to play ball for a number of colleges and universities, but he did not qualify academically to play at these institutions. So the community college

became his only opportunity and his second chance to continue playing ball, as he accepted an athletic scholarship to play for a two-year institution. He hesitantly described his situation:

I was a standout athlete in high school, but I did not have the required ACT score to play for a Division I school. I wanted to—it was my dream. It was hard. I don't know. I feel like I am in a pretty good situation here [at the community college]. There is a chance I can still play for a Division I school if I do good here. This is my second chance—maybe my only chance now, and I realize that.

Not only did Michael suggest that he still had the chance to play ball, but he implied that he now had the opportunity to become a better student before he transfers to a four-year institution. In the end, he realized that the decision to enroll in the community college was somewhat advantageous to him:

I am able to focus on the material in class because classes are small. There are less distractions and [I] ask questions when I don't understand. Instructors know me; they are nice—helpful and tell me to see them for help sometimes. It is easier to get help when I need it.

He went on to detail that in addition to having a second chance to play sports at a four-year university, this is also his second chance to become a better student. Michael realized that this is his opportunity “to learn how to study. When I transfer to a big school, my teachers don't care. From what my friends told me at other places [colleges], they [professors] don't care if you go to class. It's not like here; you gotta go to class.”

Another participant, Frank, explained that he enrolled in the community college shortly after he graduated high school, but he implied that he was undisciplined with

regard to his studies. He suggested that he lacked the motivation to complete his courses, so he enrolled in the military and would serve in the military for more than 20 years. He grinned as he exclaimed, "Uncle Sam got me together." He stated that as a result of his time in the military, he became more mature, disciplined, and motivated. After retiring from the military, he returned to the community college and is hoping to learn more about technology as he prepares for a second career. As he attended community college shortly after his high school graduation, he stated that community colleges offer second chances and opportunities to a number of students, including himself. "People from different walks of life come together and are given second and third chances at an education. This is my second chance because when I was 18, I did not have it together." Frank implied that if he had not been allowed to return to the same community college in which he previously enrolled, he likely would not have enrolled in college. He said that he was already familiar with the community college's campus as a result of his previous enrollment, so he felt a degree of safety in his decision to return to the same two-year institution. "I was familiar with the campus. I did complete some training courses at the college when I was home from deployment." His previous knowledge of and experiences with the institution were influential factors in his decision to return to college.

Similarly to Frank, Thuy, an unemployed student and divorced mother of one child, said that she returned to college in her thirties and just needed to focus on preparing for a new career. She wanted "To go back to school to get a better job. So, I said, time for a change; I can do this." Explaining that some students attend community college as they are seeking changes in their lives, Tamara, who is currently self-employed in special event services but previously worked for Fortune 500 companies before she

decided to return to the community college, said, “I think the community college offers a chance for those who want a change. But I don’t think necessarily that everyone who comes back has failed.” She went on to say that “I think it is a new beginning that is kind of like a flower that needs watering and the professors are kind of like the water and nourishment to each student.” Jessica believed that some individuals do not realize the need for a college education until later in life, after they have spent time working low-paying jobs. Illustrating the decision-making process to return to college that non-traditional students must make, she described that they come to the decision that “I don’t want to be a server for the rest of my life.” Jessica claimed that after they come to this conclusion, “They are like I am going to go back to school and get a degree and be something. So, this is like a second chance of doing something bigger with their life.” For these individuals, the community college becomes an institution of second chances after they originally pursued another line of work. Or as Linda summed it up, the community college is “a second chance basically [to] come back and live your dream.”

Theme Two: Community Colleges Offer a Quality Education

Community college students who participated in this study explained that they felt as if they were receiving a quality education. Many attributed their success at the two-year college to the faculty who provide one-on-one attention and accessibility to help students comprehend the material. The participants also emphasized that the small classes help them feel comfortable and make it easier for them to ask questions when they do not understand the information being conveyed. In addition to the faculty, staff members also were willing to provide one-on-one attention to students at the community college.

Quality of Education

As a result of their satisfaction with the community college, many of the study's research participants expressed that they feel as if they are receiving a quality education, and they realized that the writers of media are earning a living as they are making fun of others. A number of participants stressed that they are receiving an education that will prepare them to benefit others in the future, which they believe is the purpose of an education. In addition to believing that they are receiving a quality education, a few research participants noted that they have strived and achieved success at the community college. Debra, a traditional student who works part-time, contended that there are some intelligent people at the community college:

I mean, uh, you know, a lot of the people I know here are very smart, and they try very hard to get what they want. Yeah, I am going here. I am making good grades. I still have a lot of work to do and everything. I really did not associate community colleges, to begin with, [with] people who are not as educated and everything. I mean it kind of supports this idea that I have—that it does not really matter where you have your education as long as you are getting it.

Upon seeing the negative stereotypes contained within two of the media clips (Atkins, 2006; Zabielski et al., 2012) the majority of the study's research participants noted that their experience as a community college student has been quite different from the negatively stereotyped experiences portrayed in the media. The research participants explained that their own experiences at the community college have exceeded their expectations. Describing her own experiences at the community college, Barbara

explained, “I am striving here [at the community college], and it has been a great place for me.”

Likewise, another research participant, Thomas, who began his collegiate studies at a four-year institution and then transferred to a two-year institution, pointed out that he did not earn grades that were as high at the four-year institution as he is at the two-year institution. Thomas maintained that if he would have remained at the four-year institution, he does not feel as if he would have achieved on the same level as he is at the two-year institution. He also indicated that he does not feel as if he would have received the same quality of education as he is currently receiving at the community college:

I know I am going to get a good education [at the community college]. I know I am going to get at least an associate’s degree. So with that, I can do tutoring or maybe [be] a teacher’s aide at a high school.

Thomas believed that his education at the community college is preparing him for employment in the workforce. He felt as if he will be able to use the skills that he is currently learning in his classes at the community college, and these skills will allow him to impart this information to others to help them achieve success.

Service of Faculty and Staff

The two-year institution has allowed Thomas to focus on his coursework and to receive one-on-one attention from his instructors. Describing his experience at the community college, he said, “There are much less kids in the classroom [at the community college], so you can have more of a one-on-one with the teacher as opposed to 300 kids in an auditorium [at the university].” Furthermore, Thomas stated, “I already

went to a university in North Alabama. It was difficult, and I came down here and realized that it was much easier.”

Although Thomas is succeeding at the two-year institution, he realized that the smaller classes make it much more comfortable to ask questions and seek help, if needed. Like Thomas, a number of research participants in this study expressed that the faculty are instrumental to the students’ success. Some of the research participants explained that the small classes allow students the opportunity to know their instructors, and a few participants said that they realized that their instructors were just normal everyday people. John explained that “I have learned a lot, mostly about people. Teachers are people too.” Likewise, the majority of students in this study noted that the faculty will go out of their way to make sure that students understand the material. Linda stated that her instructors stay after class to answer questions and are accessible during office hours and via email to answer questions or reteach concepts. “I know a lot of my teachers, all of my teachers have been—I could not ask for anything more. They give us all of their time.” Jamal, a husband who also is employed part-time and father of two children, said, “As long as you keep ‘em [instructors] aware, they will help you out. After all, they understand that we have lives, families, kids, jobs, or maybe because I’m older.”

The majority of participants in this study explained that the faculty and staff members go out of their way to help students achieve success. In fact, Joseph, who previously attended a major four-year institution, praised his veteran affairs counselor who helps him with issues pertaining to his G. I. Bill benefits. He commented that the level of service that he receives at the community college is in stark contrast to his experiences at the university:

I have dealt with the VA [Veteran Affairs] people at Florida State and the VA people here [at the community college], and the people here are willing to go out of their way and look up any rule that they can find to help you . . . anything they can do to get you in class. They are willing to go out of their way to help whereas at a university you are just a number.

In his interactions with the community college employees in the VA office, he noticed a difference in the level of service that he received. He indicated that the attention he received from the VA personnel at the two-year institution was more individualized and supportive than at the four-year university he attended.

Theme Three: Pejorative Messages are Inaccurate

Regarding Community College Students

The majority of this study's research participants explained that they thought community colleges were often portrayed in a negative manner. After seeing the two clips (Atkins, 2006; Zabielski et al., 2012) that stereotyped community colleges negatively, a few students were surprised as to the media's portrayal of community colleges. Linda said, "I knew the reputation but not to this degree. It is bad." The majority of the research participants in this study agreed that the video clips that portrayed community colleges negatively were inaccurate with regard to community college students. With regard to the clip from *Tosh.0* (Zabielski et al., 2012) in which a skateboarder nearly runs over a non-traditional community college student, many of the research participants believed that the non-traditional student was stereotyped as being unknowledgeable of computers. Participants expressed the idea that non-traditional students return to the community college not only to learn to use technology but also to

increase their knowledge in a variety of fields, including math, science, nursing, and humanities. Debra noted that there is nothing wrong with a non-traditional student who wants to enroll in a community college to study computers. “I don’t think there is anything wrong and going or being 98 and learning computers because that is a good skill to know these days.” Critiquing the portrayal of the non-traditional student in the video clip from *Tosh.0* (Zabielski et al., 2012), Tamara remarked

Um, grandma is not here just to learn computers. Grandma can go to the community center where they give free computer classes. So, obviously, she is paying to do something in the video. She is not just coming here for that. Older, I mean non-traditional students, are on SGA [Student Government Association], nursing students, EMTs [Emergency Medical Technicians], and in culinary . . . not just here to learn one aspect but getting over and into society in a different manner. They are returning to explore new ways of life. This video displays them as older and nonfunctioning. I don’t think I am old and non-traditional. I am 40 but not old and nonfunctioning. I am in the top eight of our class.

Tamara went on to suggest that although some non-traditional students may return to learn computers, other non-traditional students may return to participate in any of the college’s programs in which they have interest.

Not only were students stereotyped in the media because of their age, but they also were stereotyped due to their ignorance and SES. Joseph, a non-traditional student and working professional, discussed that the media often stereotype all community college students as unknowledgeable and low-class:

They [the media] are attempting to convey that it [community college] is not worth it. When it comes to community colleges, it [*sic*] is the trailer park of colleges. You are not going to get your educated, high-lifestyle students there. You are either going to end up with the lower educated or older people at the community colleges.

Joseph expressed that he had a difficult time relating to the lack of knowledge and class that was often present in the media. He added, “I feel like they try to make people attending community college lower class and not quite as educated. I consider myself semi-educated.” Joseph elaborated that he has gained knowledge through life experiences as well as from the mistakes that he has made in his life. As a result of his knowledge and experiences, Joseph pointed out that he can share his experiences with other students in the classroom and enrich the learning process for all. Also, he suggested that although he does not possess a college education, he earns an excellent salary, so he elaborated on how the media attempt to stereotype all students, which, as he explained, is not representative of each and every student.

In addition to critiquing the representation of non-traditional students in media portrayals, the majority of research participants in this study commented on Atkins’ (2006) lyrics that read “discount knowledge at the junior college.” Although the song (Atkins, 2006) incorporates the stereotype of inferior knowledge often associated with the community college (Tucciarone, 2007), research participants stated that the lyrics refer to the fact that the community college offers a lower tuition rate as compared to many colleges and universities. Almost all of the research participants in this study interpreted “discount knowledge” in a manner that referred to the lower tuition prices at community

colleges in comparison to colleges and universities. Explaining this concept, Tamara said, “Discounted knowledge—the only discount is the cost of attendance from the cost of the university.” None of the research participants in the study made the connection between “discount knowledge” and inferior instruction offered at the community college that is often stereotyped in the media (Tucciarone, 2007).

As a result of the media’s tendency to stereotype community college students, there is a bit of a stigma associated with community colleges, according to research participants. In fact, Tamara shared that she has a college-aged daughter who attends a four-year institution that is located out of state. She asked her daughter to attend the local community college prior to graduating from high school, but she said that her daughter would not attend the two-year institution. Describing her daughter’s reaction when she asked her daughter to attend the local community college as well as her daughter’s reaction to her mother’s decision to complete her studies at the two-year college, Tamara explained

My daughter goes to USA [University of South Alabama], and she refused to come here [to community college] because of its influence in the community with community college. She was like mom, you do not want to do that, but I was like no, I have to pay for yours, so I am going to do this and show you that finishing is important. But she refused to even think about coming here to start because of the portrayal of it being like thirteenth grade.

Her daughter was aware of the social stigma attached to community colleges that is present in the media, and as a result, she believed the public thinks less of those individuals associated with the community college.

As some believe the community college possesses a negative reputation in the media, Debra stated the media's negative content "makes me feel better about it [my enrollment at the community college] because you know it is kind of like being proof of someone's ignorance." She explained that the media need ratings and viewers, so the writers of these portrayals create content that will attract viewers. In the end, she realized that although those in society who did not attend a community college may be more apt to believe these portrayals, those who have a community college education know the differences between their own experiences and the media's stereotyped portrayals.

Theme Four: Community Colleges Embody a Sense of Community

In viewing the fellowship present among members of the study group in *Community* (Harmon et al., 2009), the majority of this study's research participants noted that this accurately portrays the community college and its students. The majority of research participants in this study believed that there is a sense of community present among students enrolled in community colleges. Frank, who was military-retired, remarked that when he enrolled, he knew very few people on campus, but since that time, he has met new friends:

I have met some good people who help me in my classes and just friends who hang and grab lunch together. If I happen to miss class, I can ask any of my classmates what I missed. Everyone is friendly.

As Frank had spent 20 years in the Army, the majority of his friends were either retired or still serving in the military, so he was somewhat hesitant to enroll in classes at the community college. However, he said that soon after he enrolled, his anxiety was alleviated because he quickly made friends in his classes. After he became familiar with

these individuals, he learned that he could depend on them to find out what he missed in class, if he happened to miss class. He and his friends now eat lunch together or just sit together and enjoy each other's company during breaks between classes. However, upon realizing that he was limiting the sense of community that was present on campus, Frank offered a more expansive idea of community with regard to the larger institution. He described the teamwork component and visibility of the community college. "The sense of community is accurate because in my experience at the community college, there seems to be a sense of community in the campus, staff, faculty, administration. It is encouraging, and they are very involved in the community."

While there is some diversity with regard to Frank and other non-traditional students, Thomas, a traditional student, suggested that the community college campus is less diverse than that of a university. "Yeah, more of everybody, more different backgrounds coming together from the same town [at the community college]. A university will have more foreigners or more people from different backgrounds." A number of the research participants in this study expressed the idea that the small classes facilitate a sense of community. Jessica, for one, illustrated the community college campus as a close-knit community:

There is a sense of community because I have a class with someone I know, and because the classes are so small, that you really get to know everyone in the class. You get to know a lot of people on campus, and you can say, oh, I had a class with her last semester or a class with him next semester. At a big university, you don't get to say that because the classes are so big when you first start out and then get smaller as you go along. But, yeah, I think there is a huge sense of

community here because I could ask someone in a classroom if they got that answer, and I have never met that person in my life or talked to them before. And they will say yeah, yeah, here it is.

Like Jessica, Tamara also described a sense of community that exists between members of a study group:

There is a sense of community in the groups. In the classroom itself, you will build your study groups, but some students have a sense of self, and they do not want to be part of it.

Barbara said that a study group “does help build that connection” among its members. Although not all students at the community college are interested in belonging to a study group, John detailed that he would benefit from participating in a study group, but a study group “is definitely for most students who have time to spend in groups.” He asserted that the whole purpose of attending a community college was that the tuition was less than at other institutions, and attending community college would allow him the opportunity to continue living at home and working to earn money. “At a community college, you have more coursework and other things that may get in the way of some of the groupings.” As a result of his responsibilities, he implied that his time was limited, and he maintained that between his class and work schedule, he just did not have time to meet with a study group.

Nevertheless, nearly all of the research in this study expressed the idea that the students who study together with other students form a close group and share a sense of community. Even if students are older than one another, students in a study group can learn from one another. Describing this idea, Tamara explained

I feel like my age is of great value to someone else because I have made the mistakes, so please take from the mistake that I have made and make something new of it. So in my study group, we have a lot of variety in it: cultures, races, religion, and we all get along. At times, if we do not, we factor in that that is your opinion and take the negativity and turn it into something positive by you sharing why it is negative, and let's grow from it.

Tamara suggested that she is aware that disagreements have existed within her study group as a result of cultural and religious differences, but she explained that the members of the study group are able to overcome these differences and work together as a group toward a common goal, which is to prepare for an upcoming test or assignment. Linda also noted this idea of teamwork was present not only among students in study groups, but also among faculty as “everyone works as a team” to prepare students for their academic studies.

Theme Five: The Media Make Fun of Community

Colleges Because of Their Perception

Frank stated that community colleges are “an easy target” for the media to make fun of. Debra said that the media must have “something to discriminate against,” while Jessica pointed out that the media will do anything “to get a laugh.” Frank believed that “the media make fun of community colleges because they are smaller in money and student population.” In addition, he suggested that because community colleges are smaller, they have “smaller budgets and less money to market their images.”

As community colleges are smaller in size, they have less money to advertise their institutions and recruit students, according to research participants. Not only did

research participants remark that community colleges are faced with financial constraints, but research participants also commented on the student population. Discussing the diversity of the student population, Michael commented, “There is a mix at the community college: young students, older students, retirees, single parents, working adults, and married students.” He also remarked that these obvious differences of community college students provide content for comedians “because it is easy to make fun of age, especially when there are both young and old—like the old lady who is called a ‘hipster freshman’ in the show.” Even though there are a large number of non-traditional students at the community college, “it [the number of non-traditional or older students] is a stereotype,” according to Joseph. He elaborated on this idea as he remarked

It is strictly broken down by the community colleges because they are allowing people to have second chances and are willing to take them [the students] and anything that is willing to walk in the door. They don’t understand that but are willing to go back to school and to put in the work to get there.

Although the age of some students is just one reason that research participants believed that the media make fun of community colleges, participants also mentioned remedial education as another reason why the media satirize community colleges, as Thomas illustrated:

Some people may think you are stupid because you have to take remedial math first, but they are still going to apply themselves. Even if they do not know the basics, they are still going to learn the basics. They are learning a new skill, whereas you are not learning any new skills at your manufacturing plant. You are comfortable flipping burgers or making tacos as long as you can make the bills.

Thomas explained that community college students become targets for the media because they are portrayed as ignorant and unintelligent, but he stated that these individuals are willing to complete prerequisite courses, the developmental courses that will teach them the skills and the ability to apply the skills they need to be successful in future courses. Thomas dismissed these attitudes as he uttered, “They [the media] don’t understand community colleges.”

Just as the media mock community college students because “they are probably not educated enough to go to university,” as Thomas stated, the same is true with regard to socioeconomic levels. Thomas believed that community college students are also made fun of because they are perceived as “not rich enough” to attend a four-year college. Expounding upon this idea, Jessica explained that these attitudes exist not only in the media but in society as well:

I could have gotten into any university that I wanted to, but it is all a matter of money. People who are going here and planning on going to a bigger university and almost everyone here is. It is not hard to get into a university, but that is what people do not understand. Then, people are like why are you going to a community college, um, because I don’t have a lot of money, or I don’t want to go away yet, or I still want to work and go to school, too.

As a result of the low cost of community college tuition, the institution may attract the wrong type of student, according to John. He noted that “a lot of freshmen, first-semester freshman are like community college is cheap. I feel like community college can kind of be a reservoir of people who didn’t try . . . who don’t care.” Similarly, Barbara commented that a lot of the students at community college “tends [*sic*] to be people who

did not do great in high school.” John explained that because the tuition is affordable, it encourages students who lack preparation and motivation to apply. He firmly asserted, “There are a lot of community college students who cannot get into the university who think that college is just something that you have to do.” He explained that society still values these individuals but not every occupation needs training beyond high school, so he emphasized that these individuals who are “unprepared, uncaring, unaware” are better suited for the workforce. John summed up his thoughts concerning these students as he said, “These people give the community college a bad rap” in the community as well as in the media.

Summary

After coding and analyzing the data, the findings indicated that community colleges offer opportunities to both traditional and non-traditional students. Many students attend two-year institutions because they are affordable, especially when compared to the tuition of four-year institutions. Research participants also noted that they had the opportunity to live at home, to save money on housing, and to gain experience in the workforce. As a number of research participants in the study worked either full- or part-time jobs, they praised the flexibly scheduled course offerings as students are able to complete courses during the day, afternoon, or evening, and students also had the option to attend classes online. The flexibility in scheduling classes allowed community college students to spend late afternoon and evenings at home with their families and complete classes during the day when their children were attending school. Several of the research participants indicated that they were attending college to be role models for their children or to provide a better life for their future children.

In addition to providing access, flexibility, and affordability, the community college offers second chances to students, according to the findings of the study. Some of these opportunities are second chances to those hoping to play Division I sports and to non-traditional students who have spent time working low-paying jobs or serving their country. These individuals who previously had been employed in different lines of work returned to college looking for a career in which they could achieve success. In addition, research participants expressed that the community college allows them the opportunity to grow as students and to improve their study skills. The findings of the study also reflected that negative media portrayals are inaccurate portrayals of community college students. Many of the participants in this study thought that the media stereotype non-traditional students as they enroll in the community college simply to learn computers when, in fact, students can pursue any course of study.

Despite the negativity contained within the media clips, students indicated that the community college offers a quality education that prepares them for the workforce. The findings illustrated that many of the students felt as if they were succeeding academically at the community college. Many of the students in this study attributed their academic success to the faculty that provides a level of service and accessibility to students. A number of the study's research participants commented that the faculty is willing to reteach concepts after class or via email. The study's participants also explained that the staff members will go out of their way to answer questions and accommodate students.

Even though community colleges enroll students from different backgrounds, research participants suggested that there is a sense of unity present on campus. They expressed that it is not uncommon to have the same students in their classes during one

semester or to have classes with students who were in their classes during previous semesters. Likewise, students indicated that they also develop relationships with their classmates when they form study groups to help each other understand the class information. The study's participants noted that in the study groups, students work together and engage in teamwork to prepare each other for an upcoming test or assignment.

Although there is a sense of community at two-year institutions, traditional students were unable to relate to negative media portrayals, but non-traditional students were able to relate to the older students portrayed in the clips. These students related to the age or situation of some of the characters portrayed, but a number of them remarked that it was hard for them to relate to the clips that portrayed community college students as ignorant or unintelligent. However, research participants in this study believed that the media made fun of community college students because they are "an easy target." The findings of the study reflected that much of the information pertaining to community colleges that appears in the media is a result of the way community colleges are perceived by those who are unfamiliar with and do not understand two-year institutions. The research participants thought much of this treatment was due to obvious differences, namely differences in age, life experiences, socioeconomic levels, and developmental education. Participants in this study noted that these obvious differences provide comedians and script writers with content to mock community colleges and their students.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Discussion and Conclusions

This study described the attitudes, beliefs, and values among a sample of 12 community college students. As part of this study, the researcher conducted interviews that incorporated four media clips and analyzed the data to understand the media's influence. In doing so, the researcher gained an understanding of the information that students learned from media portrayals that feature community colleges. The researcher also explored whether these media portrayals influenced students to enroll in two-year institutions.

The findings of the study suggested that a sense of community is present between students who are enrolled in the same classes as well as students on campus and between members of a study group. Also, the findings indicated that community colleges are institutions that offer second chances to students who were not successful in high school and to older students who are returning to college. At the same time, the findings indicated that community colleges provide first chances to recent high school graduates who may wish to work while earning a college degree. The findings of this study suggested that media portrayals of community college and their students do not influence a student to attend a specific type of institution. Although the media were not influential with regard to a student's college-going decisions, the findings indicated that students were surprised at the negative content that was present in the media clips. This negativity reaffirmed their decision to attend a community college, as they saw their attendance at a

community college as an opportunity to achieve academic success, to earn a quality education, and to disprove the media's negative stereotypes.

Examining this phenomenon through a critical media theoretical framework (Brown, 1991; Culkin, 1964; Guy, 2007; Heins & Cho, 2003; Hoeschsmann & Poyntz, 2012; Kellner, 1995; Kellner & Share, 2005; Radeloff & Bergman, 2009; Rodesiler, 2010; Semali, 2000; Silverblatt, 1995; Tisdell, 2007) suggested that students can identify and relate to certain experiences, if an experience is applicable to their lives. For example, a student who is a first-time freshmen and has enrolled in community college immediately following his high-school graduation sees the community college as offering a first chance to students. In contrast, non-traditional students immediately realized that community colleges offer second opportunities because the majority of the students in this study enrolled in the community college after they have spent time raising a family, serving their country, or pursuing a career. However, traditional students are unable to put themselves in the situation of a non-traditional student as they are unable to relate as a result of the age differences and life experiences. Likewise, non-traditional students related to those portrayals there were most relevant to their lives, as opposed to focusing on situations that were relevant to traditional students.

Although most traditional students could not relate to the negative media portrayals of the non-traditional student, nearly all of the study's research participants stated that "discount knowledge at the junior college" (Atkins, 2006) referred to the price of tuition at the two-year institution. The research participants explained that these lyrics referred to the community college's affordable tuition but did not link "discount knowledge" (Atkins, 2006) to inferior knowledge, which is a common stereotype of

community colleges that often appears in the media (Tucciarone, 2007). On the other hand, all of the students in this study could relate to the sense of community-building among community college students and to the community college being an institution that offers second chances.

Relationship to Existing Literature

This study differed from existing studies (Bourke et al., 2009; LaPaglia, 1994; Tucciarone, 2007) in that it attempted to explain the information that students learned from the media and how this media content influenced their decision to enroll in a two-year institution. In doing so, this study went a step beyond the published studies (Bourke et al., 2009; LaPaglia, 1994; Tucciarone, 2007), which consisted of content analyses. This study differed from existent studies as it concerned movies and television shows that have been produced within the last 10 years, thus bringing the research of media portrayals and higher education up-to-date. Bourke et al. (2009) concluded that students in fictional portrayals were generally satisfied with their decision to attend a community college, and the same is true in real life. However, this study (Bourke et al., 2009) added to the fictional portrayals and suggested that even when the portrayals were negative, the students were still content and satisfied with their decision to enroll in a community college. This findings of the current study were somewhat contrary to the findings of Bourke et al. (2009) as they pointed out that negative portrayals were reflective of a student's lack of motivation and not the institution itself. This study did not find any dissatisfaction that stemmed from a lack of motivation among students.

Media as Pedagogy

The findings of this study supported Tucciarone's (2007) claim that the media teach individuals about unfamiliar institutions and experiences. The study's findings indicated that the media deterred a college-aged daughter of one of the research participants. She refused to attend a community college based upon what she had seen in the media. As result of her exposure to the media, she adopted the attitudes and values that the media conveyed that two-year colleges were "like thirteenth grade," and she refused to attend a community college. However, all of the research participants in this study were familiar with the institution as they were currently enrolled community college students, and they employed critical thinking skills that allowed them to question and evaluate the accuracy of the media's content. As research participants were familiar with the community college, their real-life experiences as community college students served as a comparative basis for the attitudes and beliefs that the media conveyed.

Despite the community college student's familiarity with the two-year institution, the problem arises with the public that is not familiar with community colleges, apart from those they see in fictional portrayals. Silverblatt (1995) affirmed that programs that were not intended to have pedagogic purposes now offer viewers insights to behaviors and attitudes as television attempts to appeal to the largest number of viewers possible. Those students who have attended community college can distinguish accurate portrayals from those that are skewed and/or exaggerated ones. The media have stereotyped certain individuals, such as the non-traditional student enrolling to learn computers and the ditzy blonde-haired traditional student, who are often associated with the community college and featured in media portrayals. The media perpetuate these stereotypes, and as they

have been reintroduced time and again, creators of media do not have to put forth the money and effort to introduce these characters and develop their personalities (Silverblatt, 1995). Due to media portrayals, viewers recognize the type of student that is often portrayed with community colleges, and as a result, they often associate these students with the institution in real life.

For many viewers, these stereotypes represent actual community college students, especially when those viewing possess no knowledge of or experience with community colleges. Kellner and Share (2005) maintained that the media shape attitudes and beliefs in society, especially as individuals lack critical media skills that allow them to question these portrayals. So television becomes a means by which individuals are assessed (Brown, 1991; Silverblatt, 1995). Instead of questioning these portrayals, individuals often assume similar beliefs as portrayed in the media, especially as television maximizes viewership by incorporating the dominant and popular attitudes of the day (Brown, 1991; Kellner & Share, 2005; Silverblatt, 1995). The findings of this study indicated that stereotypes are inaccurate regarding community colleges and their students. Although students who attend community colleges recognized that these stereotypes are inaccurate, they are problematic because of those who lack familiarity with or knowledge of the institutions. These individuals are unable to see past the stereotypes. Based on these inaccurate stereotypes, some students may choose not to attend a two-year institution when they might have benefited had they enrolled, particularly given that community colleges seem to provide good opportunities for students.

As these two-year institutions differ from the norm of a four-year college (LaPaglia, 1994), the media, according to research participants, attach a stigma to these

institutions and their students. The media may label community college students as old, incompetent, and unsuccessful. However, the research participants in this study indicated that they understand that the media's job is to entertain individuals, and they believed that individuals in society who are unfamiliar with community colleges accept the information they see on television is accurate. A few research participants expressed that the older woman, who is portrayed as a non-traditional student attending the community college, is clearly victimized as the skateboarder nearly ran her over (Zabielski et al., 2012). Many participants in the study pointed out that the skateboarder made no attempt to avoid the woman, and as he failed to do so, he exercised poor judgment. Also, many of the study's participants explained that the elderly woman should not be criticized for enrolling in college 45 years later but that she should be rewarded for wanting to learn a new form of technology (Zabielski et al., 2012).

Although ideas of social injustice manifested during the two media clips (Atkins, 2006; Zabielski et al., 2012) that presented community colleges and their students negatively, many of the research participants disagreed with the content and stated that those clips were not accurate portrayals of community college students. They noted that a sense of unity exists between traditional and non-traditional students. Also, the research participants stated that the media portrayals in which community colleges and their students were portrayed negatively are quite different from their own experiences at the community college. Students expressed a sense of satisfaction with their decision to attend community college, and this finding was very similar to Bourke et al. (2009). These researchers concluded that community college students in media portrayals are presented positively as they are generally happy with their decision to enroll in a

community college. When the portrayals were negative, Bourke et al. (2009) indicated that these stemmed from a student's lack of motivation and were not reflective of the community college.

Media's Influence on College Choice

Students opted to attend a community college for a variety of reasons, including convenience, flexibility, location, and price. Vaughan (2006) maintained that the community college's affordability and open admissions policy increase the opportunity for nearly all to attend. Dougherty (1994) wrote that this includes non-traditional, financially-struggling, and low-achieving students. The location of community colleges and their emphasis on the community allow them to meet the needs of the surrounding area, whether this involves offering academic or vocational degrees, professional licenses or recreational or special interest offerings (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). Vaughan (2006) indicated that the flexibility of offerings and convenience of locations are core components of open admissions because community colleges must remain accessible as they attempt to expand access to all. He explained that when such aspects as class offerings/programs are limited, they compromise the community college's open admissions policy. The findings of this study suggested that the media did not influence students' decisions to enroll in a two-year institution. Even when students possessed knowledge of and were aware of media portrayals that featured community colleges, the research participants stated that they decided to enroll in a community college after talking to family members and/or other students who had attended a two-year institution. In addition to consulting individuals familiar with the institutions as a source of college information, research participants in the study said that they enrolled

because of the community college's affordability and flexibility, which were also key components in nearly all of this study's participants' rationales for attending the two-year institution.

Considering that many students in this study made the decision to attend the community college because of its price of tuition and the influence of their family and friends, these students primarily supported Chapman's (1981) college choice model as opposed to the other models described in this dissertation (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982). Chapman's (1981) model theorized that students make the decision to attend college as a result of their own factors or characteristics, primarily a student's SES, aptitude, educational expectation and aspiration, educational performance, and others' influence and external influences, such as cost, financial aid, location, and programs. Jackson's (1982) three-step model explained how a student's academic achievement and aspirations impact a student's decision to attend college and career choices while Litten (1982) maintained that Chapman's (1981) and Jackson's (1982) models were too general and did not account for individual differences between students. His model focused on how students make the college choice with regard to their academic achievement, race, and gender as well as how their parents' educational levels influenced such decisions. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) combined the ideas of Litten (1982) and Jackson (1982) and created a three-step model, consisting of predisposition, search, and choice which explains students' decision-making process regarding college.

With regard to participants who attended a four-year college or university prior to their enrollment at a community college, they emphasized that the one-on-one attention and small classes at the community college are much more preferable than sitting in large

auditoriums that are full of college students. The one-on-one attention and small classes illustrate the community's college's emphasis on effective teaching and student learning, even to students who have diverse learning styles (Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Vaughan, 2006). The majority of the study's research participants pointed out that the perception or perceived image of the community college accounts for the media's enthusiasm in parodying the two-year institution. The media make fun of non-traditional students, development education, inferior knowledge, and SES as these are obvious differences and often critiqued elements of the community college. The research participants understood that the media address mainstream values and beliefs so that the majority of viewers can relate, and if viewers can relate, they are much more likely to watch the production.

As research participants understood that the media conveyed mainstream values, this illustrated that college students are able to employ critical media literacy skills to assess and evaluate the accuracy of media content, especially in watching the media clips that were part of this study's data collection process. At the same time, these research participants were familiar with the two-year institution as they are actual community college students, so the media clips in this study were not portraying an unfamiliar notion. This lends credence to Tucciarone's (2007) claim that illustrates the power of films and the media. She indicated that the media have a powerful influence in shaping the mindset of viewers when the subject matter being portrayed is unfamiliar. The findings of this study indicated that the media can deter attendance among students who are unfamiliar with two-year institutions. However, those students who were familiar with and had knowledge of two-year institutions employed critical media literacy skills,

which allowed them to assess the accuracy of the media clips and compare those experiences with their own real-life experiences. Kellner and Share (2005) maintained that media literacy skills allow students to understand media content and help them to refrain from adopting the attitudes and beliefs that are portrayed. Students who participated in this study were not influenced by the media content; in fact, many of them noted that their college experiences were much different than what was portrayed in the media.

Social Injustice in Media Portrayals

Participants' ages determined if research participants were more likely to see social injustice that manifested as a result of age. The media clip from *Tosh.0* (Zabielski et al., 2012) that featured the older woman who is a community college student colliding with the skateboarder on campus challenged the notion of a complacent retiree but reinforced the notion that non-traditional students enroll in community colleges solely to learn computers. On one hand, the portrayal presented a woman who is improving herself as opposed to living the life of a typical retiree, so the portrayal challenged the accepted notion of a retired individual. At the same time, she is stereotyped as a non-traditional student who wants to learn to use a computer, so the injustice that is present is that she is ignorant of technology and is seen as "45 years late to college" (Zabielski et al., 2012). Guy (2007) pointed out that media portrayals can challenge accepted ideas, and to an extent, the *Tosh.0* video clip did so, but it also reinforced a commonly accepted notion. In doing so, the host of *Tosh.0* (Zabielski et al., 2012) called attention to and rendered the common stereotypes and popular attitudes regarding non-traditional students that are shown on television (Brown, 1991) that the majority of society associates with

community colleges. The public normalizes these stereotypes (Guy, 2007) due in part to the woman's demographics, specifically her age (Tisdell, 2007). As a result, she becomes representative of non-traditional community college students. In using this clip (Zabielski et al., 2012), the host of the show expressed the dominant or mainstream attitudes of his audience, which is largely composed of college-aged students (TV News Desk, 2010).

In attempting to relate to the portrayal of the skateboarder who collides with the woman (Zabielski et al., 2012), non-traditional students in this study stated that the woman is victimized and degraded because she is older. One of the research participants who was a non-traditional student stated that if she actually were interested in studying computers, she would have attended free courses at the community center. A couple of students noted that she could have enrolled to study nursing or business at the community college, but because she is older, she becomes subject matter for comedians. Three of the research participants, who were non-traditional students, noted that she is stereotyped as being ignorant of computers due to her age while one of these participants noted that she should be commended for attempting to improve her own life, regardless of what she is studying. In recognizing the treatment of the woman, students used critical media literacy skills and recognized the injustice that was present. They recognized that the woman may be completing any course that is of interest to her. In doing so, they saw the oppression that is present in the clip and expressed a need for media portrayals that do not convey such oppression (Kellner & Share, 2005; Semali, 2000).

Limitations

A few limiting factors affected various components of this study. These factors focused on (1) scheduling issues and (2) participant availability.

Scheduling Issues

Due to the researcher's schedule, she was only able to interview individuals at PRCC during the late afternoons, early evenings, some nights, and weekends. A lot of individuals on campus during the late afternoons and early evenings were in class or on their way to class. In addition, some individuals were studying for an exam they would complete later that day or even working with a group to complete an assignment. The researcher was able to make initial contact and then schedule an interview later, but it was difficult in a few cases to find a time in which both individuals were available. In addition to this scheduling issue, there was very little activity present on campus during the weekends, so recruiting participants at PRCC was more challenging than originally anticipated.

Participant Availability

A key participant who the researcher identified as one who was very knowledgeable about the media was unavailable due to health reasons during the data collection phase of this project. This individual had been identified as possessing an impressive amount of knowledge that related to media culture and media portrayals of community college students. Due to the participant's unavailability, the researcher had to identify another individual who had knowledge of the media's portrayal of community colleges and their students.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results of this study, there are a number of recommendations for community colleges and their employees. Community colleges must be aware of stereotypes that exist in the media and understand the degree to which these stereotypes influence the actions and decisions of potential students. If community college professionals are aware of media portrayals, they can work to counter the content of these portrayals in their marketing plans and recruitment efforts. Community college professionals must focus on the positive aspects of their institutions, including one-on-one instruction, flexible-scheduled classes, teacher-to-student ratio, tutoring centers, and convenient locations. Employees of these institutions must reinforce these positive aspects in their marketing and recruitment materials, so individuals who are not familiar with the community college will not believe media portrayals to be true and/or accurate about community colleges (Bourke et al., 2009). Recruiters of two-year institutions need to visit high schools and address these stereotypes with high-school students. After doing so, recruiters need to counter these stereotypes by reinforcing the positive aspects of their two-year institutions as high-school students compose a captive audience that is impressionable and likely to be aware of such stereotypes.

Reinforcing positive aspects of community colleges will allow these institutions to counter negative media portrayals by embracing a culture that emphasizes the community college's mission and promotes student success, which is another recommendation for practice. Regarding the importance of an institution's culture, Hlinka (2013) explained, "The culture of an organization operates at a profound level and exerts powerful influences over the way members perceive, feel, and think" (p. 541).

Thus, this illustrates the importance of establishing a culture that is positive and student-centered. A student-centered culture embraces the idea that students and the college can achieve success. This helps to gain the confidence of its employees as well as the confidence of the local community in which the community college is located. Then, local residents will realize the accomplishments of the institution and its students, and as a result, they are more likely to hold a favorable opinion of the local institution.

In addition to creating a student-centered culture, community college professionals need to work together, in consultation with K-12 public schools, to develop a media literacy curriculum. The American public as a whole is an impressionable group of people who believe in the power of the media (Media Literacy Project, n.d; Tisdell, 2007; Tucciarone, 2007). Considering the media's influential nature, the ultimate goal should be to develop and implement a media literacy curriculum in K-12 education. Doing so would emphasize the importance of providing students the opportunity to learn and develop media literacy and critical thinking skills that will empower them to make decisions when viewing the media. This would teach students to become active participants in the media and to avoid being passive consumers, thereby enabling students to become responsible consumers of media (Anderson, 2007; Yates, 2004).

In order to develop a media literacy curriculum, community colleges should reach out to alumni who possess backgrounds in the media or related disciplines. This recommendation for practice is beneficial to community colleges because they can benefit from the engagement of their alumni. Many alumni are willing to give back to their institutions, especially if they feel as if they received a quality education, and as a result, these alumni are more likely to participate in campus activities and provide

financial assistance (“Networking,” 2013). Ashford (2011) suggested that community colleges can build relationships with alumni by asking business owners to serve on college or campus groups and/or to sponsor programs that will benefit students. In addition, Ashford (2011) explained that alumni can even serve as mentors to college students; in fact, she wrote that a community college in North Dakota has established two programs: Alumni in the Classroom and Alumni Speakers List. The first program allows alumni to visit campus and speak to current students, whereas the other program allows out-of-town alumni to participate in remote interactions and conversations with elementary and high-school students. Nodland (as cited in Ashford, 2011) noted that allowing students to establish a relationship with an institution’s alumni shows current students their successes and accomplishments in their lives, which illustrates the strength of the institution. As a result of their accomplishments, alumni can serve as recruiters for their alma mater, speaking to students in the community, at local high schools, and at career days. These individuals have knowledge of the institution that they attended and can share their experiences as students with prospective students (Heilmeier, 2013).

Although alumni of a community college can benefit their institution, there are a multitude of other ways in which two-year institutions can achieve success. Community colleges from across the nation should seek ideas from two-year institutions in Mississippi. Community colleges in Mississippi operate more as four-year institutions than two- year institutions, and as they are long-standing institutions, community colleges in other states may wish to emulate the positive aspects of these institutions. Out-of-state community colleges may want to examine the effective programs and policies that are in place at two-year institutions in Mississippi and adapt these items to fit their institutions.

For example, community colleges in Mississippi are unique in that they have athletic teams and residence halls. These components may be part of two-year institutions' success in Mississippi.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based upon the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that an expanded study that includes a larger sample and is more representative of community college students would enrich the existent literature. The sample could also be expanded to include prospective high-school students who are interested in enrolling in college and currently enrolled four-year college or university students. Students who have been enrolled at the community college are familiar with the institution, and as they continue to be enrolled at the community college, it suggests that these students have enjoyed their experiences as community college students. If they were unhappy, perhaps they would have transferred to another institution soon after enrolling. These students have experienced the community college and have been exposed to the small classes and one-on-one interaction. If students were influenced to attend a four-year institution over a two-year institution as based upon media portrayals of two-year institutions, such attitudes and beliefs may be revealed in a sample that consists of students who began their higher education at four-year colleges and universities. As these students have not completed courses at the community college and are not familiar with the two-year institution, they may have differing opinions of media portrayals that feature community colleges and their students than did students of two-year institutions. Similarly, prospective college students, namely high-school seniors, may be more influenced by the media as they are a captive audience when it comes to media portrayals concerning institutions of higher

education. These students are a captive audience because they are curious about college life as many are about to embark on this experience, so they seek information about college from media portrayals that feature colleges and universities. They think these portrayals give them a sneak peek into a world that they are not familiar with.

Considering that graduating high-school students have to make a decision to attend a two- or four-year institution, a study that consists of a sample of prospective college students looking to attend college may be more representative and bias-free as they have not been enrolled in a two-year or four-year institution of higher education.

Also, a study that examines where students acquire their information about college and how this relates to students' socioeconomics and demographics would enhance researchers' knowledge of factors that influence college choice. A study such as this may determine if there is a link between lower-class students, high-school students, and/or first-generation college students to media content. Likewise, it may establish a link between lower-class or middle-class students and if they get their information regarding college from the media or from another source of information. In addition, it would inform researchers' understanding of first-generation college students and student demographics as well as how the media influences prospective college students' choice of attending a two- or four-year institution.

In addition to learning which sources prospective students' consult to obtain information about college, a study is needed to determine if students who watch more than an average amount of television are more dependent upon the media when making decisions pertaining to college. A study such as this would benefit researchers as it may establish a link between number of television hours watched and whether this increased

viewing results in students becoming more familiar with media portrayals of community colleges and their students. Students who view an increased number of hours of television are likely to see more portrayals of community colleges and their students, and such a study may establish a relationship between media consumption and media literacy skills. If students watch more television, they may be more likely to believe what they see as they view so many fictional portrayals.

Not only would a study that examines television consumption and media literacy skills benefit researchers, but a study is also needed to determine if community college faculty can recognize stereotypes of community colleges in the media and if their students are representative of these stereotypes. This study would benefit researchers as it would illustrate whether faculty members are knowledgeable on the stereotypes portrayed in the media, and if so, it would show if faculty attempt to counter the stereotypes, as created by the media, in their classes. Likewise, students could be included in the study to see if they are aware of the stereotypes of community college students and what measures they believe can be implemented to counter these stereotypes.

Despite the stereotypes of community college students, there seems to be a strong sense of pride among alumni and current students of Mississippi community colleges, a sense of pride that is seemingly non-existent among alumni of two-year institutions in other parts of the country. A study is needed to see if this sense of pride influences a student to defend his or her institution. Likewise, a study should examine if athletic teams and residence halls increase students' pride in their institution and willingness to stand up for their institution. If institutional pride is greater among alumni of

Mississippi's community colleges, the results of a study that assesses attitudes toward media portrayals of community college students in Mississippi may find less support for the way community colleges are portrayed in the media, especially in comparison to other states in which institutional pride exists at a lower level among alumni.

Conclusion

The rationale for this study was the researcher's curiosity in wanting to examine the American public's attitudes and values toward media portrayals of higher education, specifically community colleges. Research revealed that individuals who lived in nearby communities did not possess much, if any, knowledge about these two-year institutions (Lendy, 2009). Therefore, the only exposure that these and other individuals may have to information concerning community college may be based upon what these individuals see conveyed via motion pictures and television shows (Bourke et al., 2009; Tucciarone, 2007). Considering these factors, the researcher felt compelled to design a qualitative study to examine media portrayals as well as student attitudes toward these portrayals to see the influence these portrayals have on a student's college-going decision.

In order to answer the proposed research questions, the researcher examined the information that community college students deduced from media portrayals, which sets this study apart from previous studies (Bourke et al., 2009; LaPaglia, 1994; Tucciarone, 2007). These studies failed to address if the media's portrayal of community colleges influences students' decisions or actions with regard to enrolling in a two-year institution. Using the theoretical framework of critical media literacy, the researcher examined the effect of the media on students as they decided to enroll in a two-year institution.

Using a data collection process that consisted of personal interviews that employed four media clips, the researcher examined the media's effect on students' decisions. The findings of the study suggested that community college students were not influenced by media portrayals; instead, students were influenced by current students and employees, who had knowledge of the institution. Also, students were influenced by the community college's affordable tuition, the small class sizes, and the low student-to-teacher ratios. Due to the one-one-attention and service provided by the community college faculty and staff, the majority of the research participants in this study felt as if they were receiving a quality education.

In addition to these aspects of the community college, many students attend the community college for its convenient locations and flexible class schedule. The convenient location of the campuses and flexibility of the classes allow students to attend classes while their children are in school, and they can attend classes around their work schedules. Student participants also emphasized that the community college is an institution that offers second chances to students who did not do well in high school or to those individuals who are looking for a change. In addition to this finding, students maintained that there is a sense of unity between students on campus. Many indicated that they thought this was the result of having the same individuals in a number of classes and having classes with individuals that they know from previous classes. Although unity between classmates was an idea that emerged from the interviews, several research participants pointed out that relationships between individuals flourished when they were members of the same study group. Overall, these findings suggested that college students possess critical media literacy skills and employ these skills when viewing the media.

Research participants consulted individuals, either community college employees or other students, who possessed knowledge of the institution and asked them questions about the community college. After doing so, these students formed their own attitudes and beliefs toward making their decisions to enroll in the community college, which were largely based upon their own experiences with and knowledge of the institution.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



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NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **14013101**

PROJECT TITLE: **Media Portrayals of Community Colleges**

PROJECT TYPE: **New Project**

RESEARCHER(S): **Jena Hawk**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education and Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Studies and Research**

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: **N/A**

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **02/21/2014 to 02/20/2015**

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Q: What influenced you to enroll at a community college?

Q: What influence do you think media portrayals have in shaping the mindset of Americans?

Q: What influence did media portrayals of community colleges have in your decision to enroll in a community college?

Q: What media portrayals of community college students are you familiar with?

Q: How do you think community college students are portrayed in media portrayals?

Q: What did you know about community colleges or what did you learn about community colleges from media portrayals of these institutions?

Q: How do these media clips influence your attitudes and beliefs about community colleges?

Q: How are these media portrayals different from or similar to actual community college students?

Q: How do you resonate with or relate to these media portrayals of community colleges?

Q: What did you learn about community colleges and their students after viewing these clips?

Q: What do you feel is the message that writers of these media clips are attempting to convey concerning community colleges?

Q: What accounts for the reasons that the media make fun of community colleges?

Q: How do these media portrayals make you feel about your decision to attend a community college?

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